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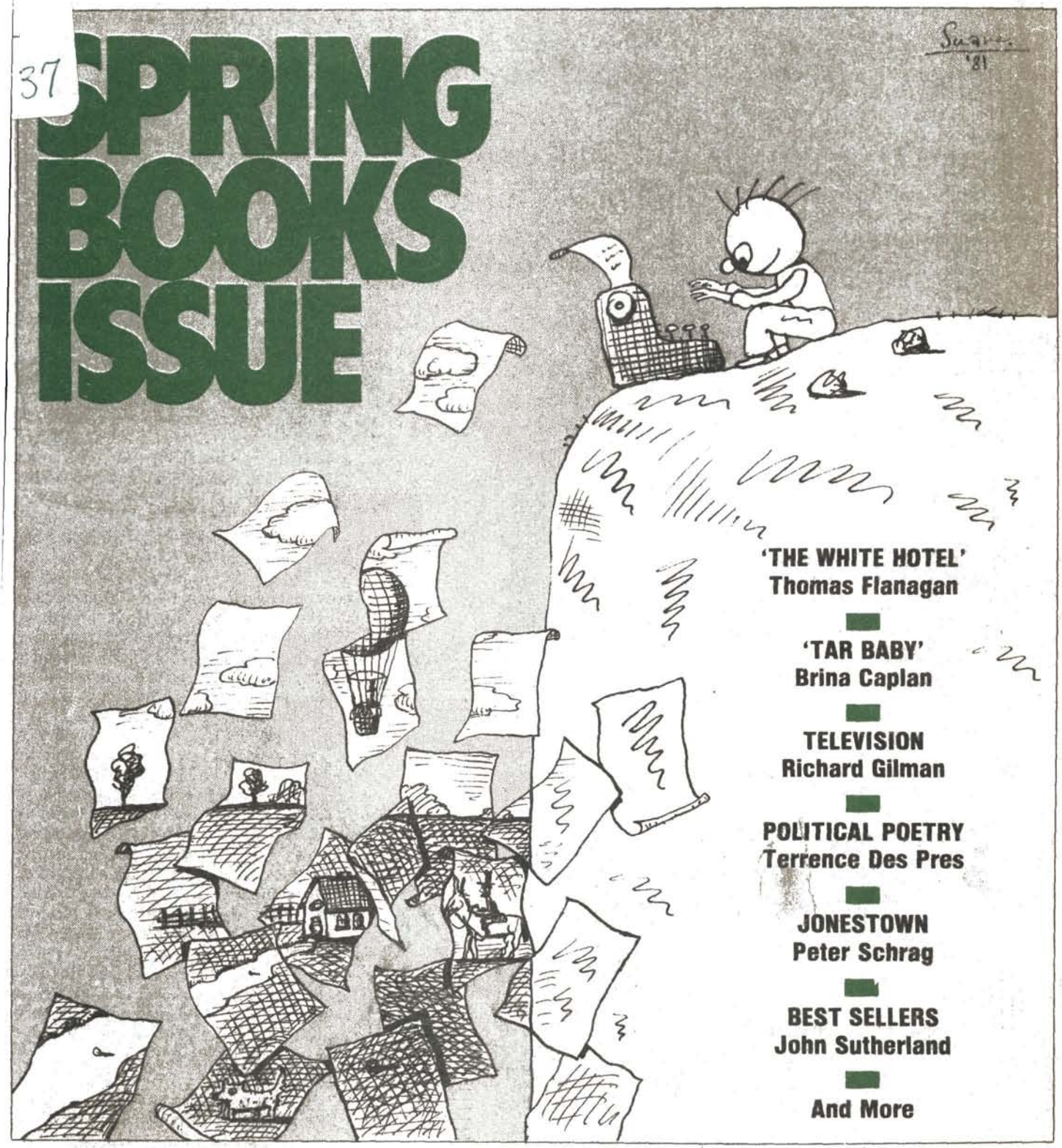

'THE WHITE HOTEL'
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LETTERS.

CHOMSKY AND THE HOLOCAUST

Los Angeles

I read with awe Noam Chomsky's windy apologia for Prof. Robert Faurisson in *The Nation* ["His Right to Say It," Feb. 28], in which he not only defends his misplaced support for free speech by pointlessly attacking others but also fails completely to see the obvious. Anybody who claims the Holocaust never happened is insane. Why shouldn't a university fire a crazy teacher who might harm students with his criminal delusions? Professor Chomsky's reliance on Voltaire helps him not at all. To say that although he disagrees with a demented man but will fight to the death to get him his job back is to admit that we live in a world entirely without values. I wonder what this ardent libertarian would have done if Hitler had been fired from a German university.

Michael Blankfort

New York City

Noam Chomsky himself says that no one had denied Professor Faurisson the right to publish his opinions. He has, though, been denied his right to profess them in a university.

There is a distinction to be made between the right to say and publish anything at all and the right to hold a position in an institution of learning when one's capacity to discern facts is seriously impaired.

Professor Faurisson has ignored copious empirical evidence. What he has professed in the university are lies, as the objective evidence easily can prove. It is true that opinions cannot always be substantiated with empirical data. Lies, however, can. No institution should tolerate a liar.

When a scientist commits a fraud, as has happened fairly often in history, his exposure inevitably leads to dismissal. No one objects. *Mauvaise foi* is not a sufficient defense. Why should Professor Faurisson be exempt from dismissal since his fraudulent teachings have been exposed?

Finally, on an emotional level, it is incomprehensible that Chomsky, so orderly and so specific in his own research, can so airily dismiss the charge of negligence. His insistence that he need not have read the text in question in order to act like Voltaire is unacceptable morally.

Dore Ashton
and Matti Megged

CHOMSKY REPLIES

Cambridge, Mass.

Blankfort, Ashton and Megged simply evade the issue. Faurisson's competence to teach has not been challenged by any academic authority, though if it had been, other and more complex questions of academic freedom would arise. Rather, he was suspended from teaching after the threat of violence. But the tacit assumptions of these correspondents deserve to be spelled out clearly. Apparently, they believe that an administrative judgment (which in this case would, in effect, amount to a state decree) that a person's writings are "fraudulent" or that he is "insane" suffices to justify dismissal from a teaching position. I wonder whether they would accept the same principle in the case of a professor of French literature who denies the crimes of Lenin or his successors or followers, or who rejects the charge that the United States committed war crimes in Indochina, "ignoring copious empirical evidence." Whether or not these correspondents are consistent in applying the principle they appear to hold, their specific reaction in the Faurisson case merits the response of Alfred Grosser of the Institute d'études politiques, which I quoted: "I consider it shocking that Mr. Faurisson should be prevented from teaching French literature at the University of Lyons on the pretext that his security cannot be guaranteed."

Ashton and Megged argue further that it is "unacceptable morally" for me to insist that I need not have read Faurisson's work "in order to act like Voltaire"—i.e., to defend his rights. As I wrote, a person who defends someone's civil rights incurs no special obligation to become familiar with the views expressed, and I have never accepted this absurd demand—nor has it ever been put forth—when, for example, I protest threats or actions taken against some East European dissident. These comments simply reveal a remarkable unwillingness to accept elementary civil libertarian principles, the most significant aspect of this entire affair.

Noam Chomsky

THE POLISH QUESTION

Milwaukee

In your March 21 front-page editorial "Waiting for Poland," you call the Catholic Church the "patron of anti-Semitism." As well as being tiresomely untrue, this charge is not even related to the point of the editorial. It appears to have been inserted merely to satisfy an irresistible itch to say something nasty about the Catholic Church whenever Poland is mentioned.

The Catholic Church has coexisted in an uneasy truce for more than thirty years in Poland with a Communist Government that all the world knows it does not really like. The strength of the Church, among other factors, has made it possible for dissent to be expressed against the Government. That Government has responded to dissent by blatantly attempting to kindle anti-Semitism. So, naturally, *The Nation*, properly vigilant to a recrudescence of anti-Semitism, blames the whole thing on the Catholic Church.

Michael Schwartz
Director, Public Affairs
Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights

New York City

To equate the situation in Poland with that in El Salvador, as the editorial "Waiting for Poland" does, is simply bizarre. It is quite obvious that the Polish Government and party have made a host of serious errors, not only in the economic field but also politically, with terrible violations of democracy, complete with corruption among several officials. The result of these is the loss of much of their authority, obviously. There is no evidence, however, that the Polish workers wish to give up any of the socialist gains they have achieved. To the contrary, they wish to expand them. The people in Gdansk and Warsaw are not demonstrating to give back their (by law) free education and free medical care, nor their one-year's paid maternity leaves nor their one-month's paid vacations nor their housing at a small fraction of their income.

What do you suppose the Salvadoran worker would think of such benefits? There is nothing comparable in their experience. For that matter, there is nothing comparable in the experience of U.S. workers either. While U.S. workers strike across the country (that is, those workers who have jobs) from the mine fields of West Virginia to the transit barns of Philadelphia, they cannot imagine that their counterparts of the Polish working class have not missed a paycheck throughout the last six months of labor strikes, any more than the Polish workers can imagine that unemployment figures for U.S. workers range from 7 percent to 38 percent, depending on age and race.

It shouldn't be necessary to remind *The Nation*, since you have reported it yourself, that in the last fifteen months, 15,000 Salvadorans—mainly workers and peasants—have been killed by the Government and its paramilitary death squads. What in Poland is there comparable to this? Can you imagine the assassination of a Polish Archbishop or the rape and murder of Polish nuns? What Polish trade unionists have been tortured and murdered? Which political leaders? If you described the conditions of Polish workers to Salvadoran workers, and the conditions of Salvadoran workers to Polish workers, who do you suppose would envy whom?

Michael Myerson

REPLY

It is not the policy of The Nation *to calumnize any racial or religious group. Nor, on the whole, is it our policy to simplify com-*

(*Continued on Page 549*)

In loving memory of Sam Krieger, 1902-1981, our very dear and devoted friend. His stimulating presence will be greatly missed.
—Fil and Miriam Oser and family

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EDITORIALS.

Tarnished Prize

Since we are primarily preoccupied this week with spring books and other literary matters, it seems a good time to examine the tawdry condition of the Pulitzer Prizes. We are abetted in this task, of course, by the Janet Cooke affair, latest in a list of Pulitzer scandals now long enough to constitute an annual tradition. As most of the media have recorded, at length and with a certain somber glee, the august *Washington Post* had to ship back Cooke's recent Pulitzer. Her winning story, a graphic tale of an 8-year-old heroin addict named "Jimmy," turned out upon post-prize inspection to be entirely fabricated. What our watchdogs have ignored, however, is the real scandal of the Pulitzers: that for years the journalism prizes have been handed out on a self-congratulatory basis by the country's newspaper establishment to itself.

The splendid irony of this year's episode is that *The Post* and Cooke would still be riding high had not the perennial corruption of the Pulitzer process again worked so efficiently. *The Post* submitted the Cooke article in the general local reporting category, but that jury recommended a Washington state daily for its coverage of the Mount St. Helens eruptions. So, presto, the Pulitzer board deftly slipped Cooke into the feature-writing sweepstakes. That jury proved even less cooperative, recommending four other nominees. *Basta*, said the board, let's give her the award anyway.

This penchant for overruling its juries has now become the board's yearly spring romp. From 1971 to 1975, it happened sixteen times. It happened five times in 1977 and five times the following year. In 1979, the editorial cartooning jury voted unanimously to honor Robert Wayne Englehart Jr. of *The Dayton Daily News*. The board instead bestowed the prize on Herblock of *The Washington Post*. It would have been Englehart's first Pulitzer; it was Herblock's third. In 1980, the general nonfiction jury proposed William Shawcross for his *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the*

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Destruction of Cambodia. But the author wasn't an American, so he, too, went by the board.

Prize-giving has never been an exact science. But the Pulitzer board has turned it into an annual exchange of presents among the top bananas of American journalism. And no wonder. For virtually all of its sixty-four-year history, the board comprised twelve members noted largely for the size of their mastheads and the limit of their vision. Not until last year were women and minorities invited in, and then only after the board was expanded to fifteen members.

One of these new members is our colleague, Roger Wilkins, and thereby hangs a somewhat sorrier irony. Like Cooke, Wilkins is black, a circumstance that led to a rumor that his lobbying won the day for affirmative action. Wilkins has denied the rumor (which implies formidable powers of persuasion on his part), but it is comforting indeed—not to mention fitting and proper in these parlous times—to hear that the Pulitzer fiasco, like the crime rate, the state of the volunteer army, the collapsing cities and the price of beans is, when you get right down to it, the fault of blacks.

Too much of the commentary on this year's scandal reads it as the exception that proves the intrinsic worth of the prizes. On the contrary, our guess is that had the "Jimmy" story appeared in *The Village Voice*, it never would have been tapped by the board. As it turned out, runner-up Teresa Carpenter of *The Voice* got the feature-writing prize for three articles on murders in New York City and West Los Angeles. Had Carpenter's stories appeared in *The Post*, the recommendation on their behalf would surely not have been overruled. When was the last time the board jettisoned a jury recommendation for *The Post* in favor of even so respectable an anti-establishment journal as *The Voice*?

All this Pulitzer politicking, of course, actually shuts out recognition of the best writing and reporting in this country. Many of the really first-rank reporters and writers of our time have not won Pulitzers, among them: A. J. Liebling, T.R.B., John Hersey, Lillian Ross, Ronnie Dugger, I. F. Stone and Robert Scheer, not to mention our own Fred Cook, Robert Sherrill and, of course, Carey McWilliams. Doubtless the Pulitzer board would argue that these people fall outside the newspaper venue established for the journalism prizes in 1917. That may be partly true. But it still leaves us wondering, and with no disrespect to Carpenter intended, why the board has never been able to find a prize for *The Voice*'s Jack Newfield, who has been doggedly outreporting his less scruffy confrères for more than a decade. Another nonwinner, Jules Feiffer, has been out-drawing his colleagues for even longer. As for David Levine . . .

The real point here is that the Pulitzer Prize is too narrow, and it is utterly self-serving. With occasional exceptions, the prizes reward not the best journalism but the best of safe, formula journalism as practiced by safe, formula newspapers. Either the Pulitzers should be reorganized to consider the widest possible spectrum of American journalism or they should be junked. Since neither is likely to happen, perhaps the best bet would be to rename them the Sulzberger-Graham-Chandler-Dow-Jones Revolving Trust.

Higher Authority

Like Gerald Ford's pardon of Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan's pardon of W. Mark Felt and Edward Miller conveys a simple message: high-level government officials need not fear criminal punishment for violating the constitutional rights of citizens. To a more special group, the intelligence community, it also sent a signal that illegal entry in pursuit of evidence against dissidents is no vice. One as Felt ebulliently put it: "This is going to be the biggest shot in the arm for the intelligence community in a long time."

President Reagan's pardon of the two Federal Bureau of Investigation men made a rather surreptitious entry itself, being first announced by the pardonees on April 15, even though it had been signed on March 26. In his statement extending executive clemency, the President said: "The record demonstrates that they acted not with criminal intent, but in the belief that they had grants of authority reaching to the highest levels of government." As the Federal special prosecutor in the case, John Nields, pointed out, the "record" showed that a jury had found that the two men had no authority for their actions. To Nields, Felt and Miller are still guilty, and they remain felons to us.

Beyond protesting the pardon, it is important to expose official wrongdoers who trample on constitutional rights. Victims of illegal break-ins should sue for civil damages, and it should be suggested to judges that the damages take into account the unlikelihood of criminal punishment.

The most recent crisis in Poland involved a demand by Solidarity that Communist security officers—the counterparts of Felt and Miller—should be prosecuted for abusing workers. We propose that Lech Walesa send an emissary to organize a branch of Solidarity over here. Perhaps the Poles have something to teach us about vigilance being the price of liberty.

LERNOUX AWARD

The Nation is proud to announce that Penny Lernoux, our Latin America correspondent, has been selected to receive the 1981 Sigma Delta Chi Distinguished Service Award in the field of magazine reporting.

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UNDERSTATEMENTS.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

Brecht in the Bronx

Don't get me wrong. New York is not America. Of this I'm well aware. I know it annoys. But, listen . . .

The New York Metropolitan Opera recently concluded its splendid run of *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. For a newcomer to this city, secure in his role as a gaping Candide, Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill provided their usual feast of easy metaphors. I brushed them aside (the metaphors, that is) as casually as one shrugs off Brecht's tenderness for Stalinism. But certain tedious and old-fashioned thoughts still clung like burrs to my jacket as I left the gorgeous Metropolitan throng.

Mahagonny sings of a failed attempt to create the just city. Refugees of all stripes and shades come to the desert utopia—and end up creating a hellhole. All those who believe that we are naturally wicked should be delighted by this paradox and no doubt *would* be delighted if they could bear to quote a German subversive. The endless disappointment which attends the mushy idealist has never, surely, been celebrated with such mordancy. Or has it?

Many people think that Brecht had New York in mind when he wrote his libretto, but in fact he had not even visited America by then. It may or may not be "significant" that New Yorkers recognize their hometown in such a scathing parody. Still and all, there's obviously some force in the comparison, and in the idea of a lucky community that is brought low because everything is for sale.

It so chanced that next day I made a voyage through the South Bronx. The thing about this district (out-of-town readers, bear with me) is not its famously desolate and stricken appearance. True, the scorched and bleak aspects are the ones most immediately noticeable. Great corridors of desolation have been driven through the borough, creating arid spaces where only the basest kind of commerce can thrive or even endure. And, presumably, everybody knows this, just as they know about Calcutta. There have been, also, several well-advertised, brow-furrowed, utterly doomed Presidential visits to the area. But in fact, the chaos and the smoldering are not the really salient impressions one brings back across the bridge. Any fool can describe and mourn the poverty and the squalor—the sort of Oxfam journalism that glossy magazines used to delight in. No, what struck me about the South Bronx was not its being "poor next-door to plenty" so much as its fearful lack of any civil solidarity.

Seeing a crowd gathering, with many police cars and ambulances in attendance, I made a show of indifference and slouched into the area. It emerged that a man had jumped or been shoved onto the elevated railway track above. A train was stalled over his body. "Cut near in half," I was told by a laconic policeman. Under the bridge, the youths of the area were having a ball. One boy was diverting the crowd with wisecracks when, in plain view of the company, something nameless began to dribble from the overhead. Dancing aside, the entertainer raised a cackle by shouting "don't leak on me, man!" I began to edge squeamishly away. Not (to paraphrase Lord Macaulay) because of the suffering of the victim but because of the callousness of the spectators. As in the closing scenes of *Mahagonny*, the poor loser finds very suddenly that he doesn't have any friends at all.

Let me now try to alleviate some of my own pomposity. There are many ghastly areas of the urban world. But in all that I have visited, including Soweto and Belfast and even Beirut, there is a redeeming aspect. The poor there do not vamp so much upon one another; they do not share the predatory assumptions of the rulers. Even in conditions of actual warfare, there is some sense of community (a word much abused in America, often translating as "neighborhood," or even "group"). What Brecht and Weill meant by the breakdown of Mahagonny was not merely violence, corruption, greed or even jealousy and war. All those could be allowed for and, except for the very last, survived and improved upon. But take away solidarity, even in its banal "Beat the Blitz" sense, and "hark what discord follows." We are left with the war of all against all.

Now, conservatives are trained to sneer if you blame general misery and bewilderment (all right, alienation) on "the system." Nor should you do so, if there is a convincing and proximate alternative (like certifiable insanity). What is bound to strike the outsider, however, be he or she a conservative or no, is that there is no *need* for Americans to live like that. V.S. Naipaul once remarked of India that it was a very unsubtle country; that poor people were thin and rich people were fat. Can Americans do no better? And does "the system" or the Administration have to feel responsible if not?

Heart bleeding, I mildly propose that it does and they do. The theory of a "trickle-down" (grim term in the context of that railway bridge) from the wealthy layers to the poor sediment has proved more idealistic than the most callow Brechtian Marxism. The ideas of the right, their simple-minded utopianism, seem pathetic when measured against reality. The ideas of the liberals are not much better. They stress the *contrast* between wealth and poverty when what needs stressing is the *connection*.

Indeed, you could say that that was the essential difference between the radical position and the religious or patronizing one. The area has had every kind of pity and concern lavished upon it: the irony is that conservatives may prove themselves right in saying that the inhabitants have lost the will to fend for themselves. The South Bronx, even to a tourist Englishman reared on modest slum-clearance socialism, is a drab reminder of an old story. And here we have, in the American 1930s, a Mahagonny government that will fight for you when you are unborn, and will bully you about your afterlife, but which doesn't give a shit for you in between.

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DISPATCHES.

■ PHILIPPINES: Two Terrorists Meet

To Imelda Marcos, wife of Filipino President Ferdinand Marcos, Steve Psinakis is the chief military strategist of the urban guerrillas who are challenging her husband's regime. Psinakis regards Imelda Marcos as partly responsible for the "institutionalized terrorism" that had nearly destroyed his wife's family and victimized his closest friends. Still, the two spent five hours together on December 19 at the Waldorf Towers in New York City. Psinakis describes the meeting in a new book, *Two Terrorists Meet*, which recounts the delicate negotiations that preceded President Marcos's lifting of martial law last January.

Mrs. Marcos asked to meet with Psinakis, a Greek-American businessman who married into a prominent Filipino family, because she considers him the military genius behind the unlikely crew of priests, nuns and middle-aged businessmen whose bombings have so embarrassed the Marcos regime. Violence by the traditional opposition groups that regard exiled Senator Benigno Aquino as their leader had to be stopped. To find out what it would take, Mrs. Marcos met separately with both Aquino and Psinakis. She threatened them, tried to bribe Psinakis, and finally promised that her husband would take steps to liberalize Filipino politics. Lifting martial law was to be only the first step.

In the Waldorf Towers meetings last December, Mrs. Marcos boasted of her close ties with President Reagan and former President Nixon. She showed Aquino a videotape of Nixon at a private party, in the course of which he calls her "the Angel from Asia." She confided to Psinakis that Reagan "practically told me not to lift martial law yet," because too rapid liberalization might cause a social upheaval. She accused both Aquino and Psinakis of sending assassination squads to the Philippines and threatened to retaliate in kind.

In his book Psinakis portrays an Imelda Marcos who is vain and ruthless, yet curiously eager to cooperate. In the end, he says, she and her husband were unable to make more than cosmetic changes in their regime because of opposition from hard-line military leaders who refused to be intimidated by what they viewed as a "bunch of kids" playing at guerrilla war. Psinakis thinks Imelda Marcos understands the threat the insurgents pose and fears the violence that lies ahead.

■ VIETNAM: M.I.A.s

Recently, in a bizarre scheme, a group of ex-Green Berets began training in Florida to "rescue" American soldiers who, they believe, are still being held by the Vietnamese. The team of would-be commandos was led by retired Lieut. Col. Beauregard Gritz, who told the Orlando *Sentinel Star* that he had received the "blessing" of families—he did not specify how many—of the estimated 2,500 U.S. military men still missing in action from the Vietnam War. The planned raid into Vietnam was scrapped after news coverage apparently frightened off the anonymous financial backers.

The aborted plot preyed on the unquenchable hopes som families of the M.I.A.s still have that a son or father coulc conceivably, be alive and secretly held prisoner. It is desperate hope, and one that has also been exploited b politicians who oppose normalization of relations with Viet nam. Yet, realistically, an end to the hostile relations be tween Washington and Hanoi is probably the only way t elicit from Vietnam any more information about U.S. serv icemen who are still unaccounted for.

The Vietnamese have categorically denied that an M.I.A.s are alive and that they are holding them prisoner Don Luce of Clergy and Laity Concerned met last month i Vietnam with Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach, whc vigorously reiterated that denial. Luce told "Dispatches," "Thatch asked, 'Why would Vietnam still hold prisoners o war? There is no reason, no political advantage.' If th Vietnamese had wanted to use P.O.W.s in negotiations they would have done so years ago."

Luce argues that normalization of relations with Vietnan would expedite the search for the remains of M.I.A.s—ar expensive, laborious process for which the Vietnamese have shown no enthusiasm ever since the severe deterioration in U.S.-Vietnamese relations after the Chinese invasion. "It is hard," he says, "for the Vietnamese Government to explain to its people why it is important to search for the lost, makeshift gravesites of the Americans who were bombing them, especially when the United States is now seen as actively allied with China against Vietnam." But to politicians in search of a vote, or soldiers of fortune out to make a buck, what the Vietnamese think means little.

■ NICARAGUA: Unrewarded Pragmatism

The Reagan Administration could not have chosen a less opportune time, even from its own warped perspective, to implement its punitive aid policy toward Nicaragua. When the State Department announced a complete cutoff of economic aid for Nicaragua last month, the Nicaraguan Government was displaying flexible and pragmatic policies toward the United States, especially U.S. banks and corporations. A Government team was renegotiating payment of $170 million in debts incurred by Nicaragua's private banks during the last years of Anastasio Somoza's rule. (The public debt was renegotiated last fall.) When the Government nationalized the private banks in 1979, some were nearly bankrupt, and U.S. banks feared the junta might refuse to honor their debts. But the Nicaraguan Government and ten U.S. banks whose loans were still outstanding reportedly reached an agreement on repaying the debts in early April. The negotiations were marked by a surprising flexibility on both sides.

The Nicaraguan Government is also in the early phases of writing a law to define rules for new foreign investment. Alfredo Cesar, who headed the debt renegotiation team, is in charge of drawing up the law. The proposals reportedly under consideration so far are remarkably liberal. They would allow for foreign investment in all sectors of the

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ELIZABETH FARNSWORTH AND STEPHEN TALBOT

economy except national defense, transportation and communications. Even projects with majority foreign ownership would be acceptable in non-forbidden sectors of the economy, though foreigners would be expected to reduce their equity participation to 49 percent within fifteen years.

And so, in Managua, Sandinists and private sector leaders alike shook their heads at the news of the aid cutoff. The Reagan Administration announced that it hoped in the future to continue to "assist the moderate forces in Nicaragua which are keeping alive the private sector," but the cutoff will have exactly the opposite effect, causing increased economic difficulties that will quite possibly hurt the private sector. Once again, ideology triumphs over good sense in Central America.

■ U.S.S.R.: What Master Strategy?

Alexander Haig and other top global thinkers in the Reagan Administration would have us believe that the leadership of the Soviet Union has a master strategy for world revolution. In particular, they conjure up an image of a monolithic Soviet decision that the time is ripe for total revolution in Central America.

That image is false, says Russian specialist Jerry Hough of Duke University, on the basis of study at several Soviet foreign-policy institutes, including the Institute of Latin America. In fact, Hough writes in an article in *Latin American Research Review*, a lively public debate on Latin America is going on—usually in scholarly journals—among the very people who write the classified memorandums and proposals that play an important part in shaping Soviet policy. The debate at the lower levels usually indicates a lack of agreement higher up, Hough told "Dispatches." This means that Soviet planners probably do not agree on what is happening politically in Latin America, let alone on a master plan for fomenting revolution there.

Differences among Soviet Latin Americanists have been especially fierce since the overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973, which raised questions about building socialism within a "bourgeois democratic" framework. Now Nicaragua's experience under the Sandinists is leading to reassessments of the nature of socialism and revolution in the Third World.

According to one school of thought—which is represented by, among others, Kiva Maidanik, the top Latin America specialist at the Institute of the World Economy and International Relations—Nicaragua's current situation is inherently unstable, and so it must go the Cuban route or risk falling under the control of the bourgeoisie. This view is opposed by scholars with equally impressive credentials and access to high-level policy makers. They argue that Nicaragua has no choice but to maintain a mixed economy and pluralistic political system, and that it will have to seek capital for development from the West. This faction holds that the choice in much of Latin America today is not between capitalism and socialism but rather between bourgeois democracy and fascism.

Hough argues that each of the contending groups of Latin Americanists in the state-run research institutes has its champions within the Communist Party central committee. And so, for the future, the U.S.S.R. is likely to pursue ad hoc, reactive policies in Central America rather than the master strategy of Haig's rhetoric.

■ LIBERIA: Green Berets to the Rescue

Millions of dollars in U.S. military aid to Liberia did not prevent the overthrow and assassination last year of President William Tolbert Jr. by his own troops led by Master Sgt. Samuel K. Doe. And the 100 Green Berets who arrived in Liberia last month (See Flora Lewis's column in the April 13 *New York Times*) will not be enough to maintain Doe's regime, unless the sergeant delivers on his populist promises to Liberia's impoverished 1.8 million people.

Doe requested the U.S. show of force, which included a port call in Monrovia, the capital, by the U.S. destroyer *Thorn* and a parachute display by the Green Berets. The Special Forces detachment is remaining in Liberia for at least one month to train members of the Liberian Army. In addition, the Reagan Administration has "reprogrammed" $25 million in aid to Liberia on top of the $33 million in economic and military assistance already appropriated for this year.

Why this generosity from the budget-slashing Reagan team? "This Administration values its traditional friends and Liberia is an old friend," a State Department official told us. But the real reason is that all is not well for the Doe regime, and Washington is worried. The ousted Tolbert Government—which represented the pro-U.S. but often corrupt "Americo-Liberian" elite—left a paltry $5 million in the treasury and a staggering $700 million debt. Since the April 1980 coup, Liberia has suffered a capital flight of up to $50 million as Americo-Liberians and local Lebanese businessmen abandoned the country. Given Liberia's dire economic straits, the Reagan Administration is fearful that Doe might take up offers of Libyan financial aid. Sending in the Green Berets and boosting U.S. assistance is designed to head off a Liberian-Libyan alliance and to deter the Liberians from responding to future overtures from Ethiopia and Cuba.

But the greatest threat to Doe's continued rule comes not from Libya but from his failure to follow through on the economic and social transformation his revolt promised [see Talbot, "Liberia—Roots of Revolution," *The Nation*, May 10, 1980]. To the delight of Liberia's long-suffering indigenous population, Doe began by purging the old Americo-Liberian elite, abolishing the hated "hut tax" and raising civil service salaries. But more recently he has outlawed strikes and cracked down on iron ore, rubber and dock workers. Doe's coup was undoubtedly popular, but patience is wearing thin with the lack of progress and reform, especially among the leftists in his Cabinet and among workers. It is the kind of frustration the Green Berets are not adept at defusing.

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VARIATIONS.

CALVIN TRILLIN

WASHINGTON, Aug. 16—It remains too early to say whether Secretary of State Alexander Haig's effectiveness will be permanently impaired by revelations that he summoned the State Department's forty-three ranking officials to State's executive dining room last Thursday at 4 in the morning to account for two missing portions of strawberries. For the time being, at least, the White House has sent strong signals of support by passing the word among Administration insiders that they are no longer to refer to Mr. Haig by the nicknames they have used ever since he showed some confusion about the order of Presidential succession while briefing reporters on last spring's assassination attempt—Old Number Three and Alexander the Grape.

For General Haig, of course, the revelations came at a particularly bad moment, on the heels of some difficulty he has had extricating himself from the impression that he was being disrespectful to American nuns killed in El Salvador when, in defending the junta's long-awaited report on the incident ("We conclude that gunfire was involved"), he again referred to them as "sisters run amok." General Haig has complained that the phrase was taken out of context—a complaint he has also made concerning the phrases "trigger-happy dames," "left-wing adventurers" and "Commie traitors." State Department aides, in attempting to defuse some of the controversy, have pointed out that Mr. Haig, a Roman Catholic, was brought up by nuns, though not terribly well.

Facts are just beginning to emerge about what took place Thursday morning after Mr. Haig discovered the strawberries missing at approximately 3:20 A.M. during what the State Department is now describing as "a routine inspection tour of the pantry." A few early rumors about the incident seem to have been disproved. General Haig was not in battle fatigues during the interrogation of his top aides, nor was he armed. The Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs was not, in fact, forced to undergo a strip-search for hives; he was simply having trouble with the drawstring of his pajamas. All shortcake was accounted for. What was at first reported to have been foam at the corner of the Secretary's mouth was apparently Reddi Wip.

State Department sources have said unofficially that Mr. Haig had been out of sorts since late Wednesday afternoon, when what had been an extremely successful state visit to Washington by the royal family of Belgium was marred by a stern statement from the Belgian Embassy correcting any impression Mr. Haig might have given that he was in the line of succession to the Belgian throne. The State Department has said that the phrase that seemed particularly offensive to the Belgians—"I happen to be a Hapsburg on my mother's side, so la-dee-da"—was taken out of context.

The Belgian flap was not the only development at State last week that Mr. Haig might have found upsetting. A strong protest was registered from Tokyo after American officials finally acknowledged that the ramming of a Japanese freighter by an American nuclear submarine last spring, previously called an accident, had indeed been part of Secretary Haig's strategy for persuading the Japanese to limit automobile exports voluntarily. Mr. Haig was personally embarrassed Tuesday when further inspection of the photograph he had confidentially represented as being "the secret Communist military headquarters" that justified the incursion of American troops into Guatemala showed it to be, as critics of the war had claimed from the start, an abandoned empanada stand. State Department officials are also telling reporters that Mr. Haig may have worked himself into a state of exhaustion, having recently shrugged aside the suggestion of anxious aides that he limit the time he spends posing for statues to four hours a day.

White House sources have also mentioned overwork in defending Mr. Haig, and have even made some attempt to justify the strawberry investigation itself—pointing out that Mr. Haig is "a take-charge guy" and that the Administration is publicly committed to eliminating government waste at all levels. Some Washington observers are theorizing that support from the White House is based less on enthusiasm for the general than on concern about who would replace him. The Deputy Secretary of State, William Clark, is said to have made enormous progress since his embarrassing confirmation hearing—after daily tutoring from State Department specialists, Mr. Clark can now name the capitals of all fifty states and find his way to the office three days out of five—but European confidence in American foreign policy would obviously not be enhanced by putting the State Department in the hands of a man who only eight months ago revealed himself as someone who thought Giscard d'Estaing was a type of late-harvest California Chardonnay. Although President Reagan has thus far been able to shrug off charges that his National Security Adviser, Richard V. Allen Inc., is guilty of conflict of interest, the Administration obviously would not welcome an extended State confirmation hearing that concentrated on the propriety of Mr. Allen's sideline of renting out the White House situation room for private business meetings.

For whatever reason, the Administration seems to be behind Mr. Haig for the present—even though there was some dismay when he arrived at the White House for a meeting on the strawberry incident costumed as Louis XIV. Yesterday, a White House spokesman strongly denounced as "insensitive and wholly without foundation" the comment by Speaker of the House Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill that the Secretary appeared to be "crazy as a bedbug." Still, the Administration is not underestimating the difficulties involved in restoring faith in Mr. Haig's reputation, even if it can persuade the strong-willed general to abandon such trappings as his sedan chair. "Let's face it," one White House insider said this week. "When you've got the Secretary of State putting all American troops in the world on general battle alert because of two missing portions of strawberries, you've got some explaining to do."

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

'Even a Limerick . . .'

TERRENCE DES PRES

In the United States, at present, there are 3,536 publishing poets. That is the figure in the 1980-81 edition of *A Directory of American Poets and Fiction Writers*. It includes, of course, many talents doomed to crisp and fade, but a goodly number doing solid work, and some—time will sort them out—who seem destined for a permanent place in our literature. Output is surely not slack, and neither is response. *American Poetry Review*, the most youthful of our journals, counts 25,000 subscribers. No self-respecting university, meanwhile, is without its writing program, its poetry workshop and schedule of readings. And if large publishers print only handfuls of titles each year, a horde of small presses —Laughing Bear, Banjo, Appalachian Consortium—rush to insure no line gets lost.

The state of the art would seem to be splendid, and yet it is not. There is much energy, much dedication, but the main drift of our poetry in the last few years has been deplorable for its thinness of vision, its lack of amplitude and will. Was Frederick Seidel's *Sunrise* the best new poetry to appear in 1980? He won the National Book Critics Circle Award, and the 300 working critics and reviewers who supported this judgment possess a fund of practical sense I tend to trust. Lines like these—

> It is an age we may not survive.
> The sciences know. We do believe in art
> But ask the computer to hear and preserve our cry.
> O computer, hear and preserve our cry.

—suggest Seidel's appeal. He does not, like his peers, go on and on about himself or nature. He does not presume to be sole maker of the world he meets. In fact, the world revolts him, but not so much that he cannot, through his art, shove back. Much of his work bears witness to social and political forces that ruin life's sweetness, and in these ways Seidel does stand out.

But beyond dispute, the big events last year were the appearance in this country of Bertolt Brecht's *Poems 1913-1956*, issued by Methuen, and Paul Celan's *Poems*, published by Persea. Both are translations from German, and right behind them come Marina Tsvetaeva's *The Demesne of the Swans* and Miklós Radnóti's *The Complete Poetry*, respectively Russian and Hungarian. For the most part, these are collections from entire careers, works that go back one and two generations. These particular poets, furthermore, were all victims of murderous political upheaval, two of them suicides, one killed by a firing squad. Critical opinion in America insists on keeping art and life separate, but for the examples just cited, history overwhelms both life and art, forcing a fusion of private and public realms. That is the great difference between such poetry and our own. The fact that poetry of this kind now has serious readership, or simply that within the last decade the influx of poetry in translation has increased dramatically, signals a shift in our own literary situation.

We are reading more literature from abroad for at least two reasons. Consciousness has become global, and sensitivity to other traditions is more natural than it was, more inquisitive and open. It is also more necessary, given the political and economic meshing of peoples and nations. The cardinal form of mediation in our time is not between self and nature or society but between self and history in a world where all fates interlock and where, as Thomas Mann put it, "the destiny of man presents its meaning in political terms." Entrapment in world events is real; disturbance anywhere sooner or later touches us at home, and with accelerating frequency political forces intrude, disrupting regions of self and spirit once thought to be inviolate. The remarkable fact is that with few exceptions—Lowell and Rukeyser and still, here and there, a Levine, a Simic—our own poets refuse in their art to acknowledge a condition from which none of us is exempt.

In consequence, we are turning elsewhere, and not only to Brecht and Celan. They are the latest examples, but we have been under the spell of poets like Neruda and Vallejo, Akhmatova, Mandelstam and a small army of Eastern Europeans for at least the last ten years. Robert Lowell's commanding presence—his genius for combining personal and historical experience—may have kept these others in the background, but with Lowell gone I think we must admit that much of the compelling poetry available to us is coming from other countries, other traditions, principally from places torn by political strife, and mainly, of course, in translation. Even within our own current circles, younger poets like Seamus Heaney (Irish), Derek Walcott (West Indian) and Joseph Brodsky (Russian) are respected as highly as native masters. Their impact has seemed almost magical, and that Heaney and Walcott shall now be part time at Harvard suggests the degree to which established boundaries are failing to hold. Our Emersonian inheritance, with its premium on the exclusive perceptions of isolated selfhood, no longer sustains the work it continues to govern. And this takes us to the heart of the matter: not that American poets aren't writing excellent poems but that their poetry is curtailed—often to inconsequence—by a tradition gone destitute.

DRAWINGS BY J-C SUARES

Terrence Des Pres, the author of The Survivor *(Oxford), is currently writing a book about poetry and politics, from which this essay is adapted.*

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If the end is in sight, evidence ought to be everywhere at hand. Deliberately I page through a stack of recent magazines, weeklies, monthlies, quarterlies, and examples appear like leaves in a gale. If you go into any poetry shop and pick a book at random, I guarantee that you will find a poem—some study in self or nature—similar to this one. Here the poet's donnée is the pathos of aging, life's downhill drift when "the deep, skeptical frost has come and left its first/Hard mark." Of the poem's thirteen lines, here are the first seven.

Where are we now, then? Unable to
remain simply
Autumnal any more, what with
markets overfull
Of bad red paintings of late afternoon, I locate
My inner weather for you on the
map of the year:
Say it is a spell of cold, of chilled
nights in the midst
Of a long Indian Summer struck
dumb with its own
Fair *longueurs*. . . .

This "inner weather" business is rampant in American verse, the tag-end version of that union between nature and self—the egotistical sublime—on which our poetic practice was founded. In the poem just quoted, this mode is handled with muted elegance and charm, and not without a sort of prancing irony got by punning and wordplay. The poet uses such skills to keep his distance from a subject which is true and sad, but not so very sad, and finally not worth more than a hint of earnest engagement. He knows that for all but the lucky few, life is lots worse than aging gracefully.

That a poem is slight is nothing against it. As Auden liked to insist, poetry of every kind is worth having, and minor modes have their place. But the poem in question is prudent to a fault—an old maid courted by incapacity, as Blake would say—a poem which admits its claim is minuscule. Written by a poet of high reputation, published in a national magazine, this is what we have come to: skill without nerve, poetry with no taste for the actual beyond what craft can readily absorb or self encompass. Here, on the other hand, is one of Brecht's late poems, complete:

At the time when their fall was
certain—
On the ramparts the lament for the
dead had begun—
The Trojans adjusted small pieces,
small pieces
In the triple wooden gates, small
pieces.
And began to take courage, to hope.

The Trojans too, then.

Large in every way but length, this poem might even include the current plight of poetry in America. But, of course, the defeat Brecht addresses is the universal curse of a civilization that has failed. Our sustaining faith in Progress and Enlightenment is dead and we do not have to know much about Brecht's personal commitment to Marxist ideals in order to share his bitterness, his sense of betrayal. Such a theme is public and historical, but it does not—as American critics always argue—violate the integrity of private vision. On the contrary, whereas the "inner weather" poem might have been written by any of several hundred poets, Brecht's is entirely his own, especially the subtlety and swiftness with which that amazing last line, by turning history back upon itself, enacts the poem's theme and gathers two centuries of human struggle into an instant of tragic recognition.

To compare a finished career like Brecht's to an *oeuvre* still growing is less than fair. But that we do it anyway is part of the problem. The peculiarity of the moment is that for the first time enough poetry is arriving from other contemporary cultures to afford choice between work of our own poets and works which are foreign but which, strangely, seem more familiar, more at grips with what we feel and witness. This kind of choice is real and more pressing daily. A new anthology of American verse prides itself on poems about "marshes, lakes and woods, Sweet Emma of Preservation Hall, a Greek lover, an alchemist, actresses, fairy tales, canning peaches in North Carolina," stuff that can hardly be expected to survive the usual evening's news report, let alone our darker forebodings. But then, on the verge of admitting that poetry no longer counts, we find poems like this one by Celan:

The stone.
The stone in the air, which I followed.
Your eye, as blind as the stone.

We were
hands,

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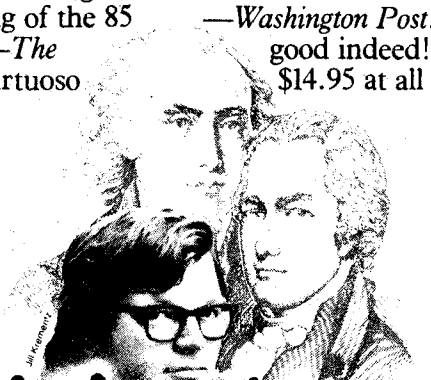

Explaining America: The Federalist
BY THE AUTHOR OF INVENTING AMERICA
Garry Wills

* Alan Wolfe, *Newsday*

DOUBLEDAY

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we baled the darkness empty, we
found
the word that ascended summer:
flower.

Flower—a blind man's word.
Your eye and mine:
they see
to water.

Growth.
Heart wall upon heart wall
adds petals to it.

One more word like this, and the
hammers
will swing over open ground.

The translation is sound except for the last line, which ends *im Freien*—in boundless, absolute abandon, which might be joyous or might be demonic. Even so, the power of this poem's compression is so great, we might compare it to a diving bell some thousand feet down in the sea. And the mode here is not symbolic: it is the metaphoric burst and stammer of actual speech when the pain of awareness becomes extreme. In a world of war and death camps, "flower" is indeed a blind man's word. Except in America, pastoral discourse has disappeared; to expect it to bear the burden of knowledge in this bad century must seem insane. Celan's poem struggles to confront a murdered word, no more than that. But having dared this much it calls up not only hope but also the echo of infinite loss, and as it advances it wakes an undertow of terror. What will be the cost if words come back to life? Those ready hammers, are they Blake's or Lucifer's? That the poem opens itself to such dangers makes it, small as it is, extravagant to a reckless degree.

Celan's family perished in the Holocaust, and he himself died a suicide in 1970, at the age of 49. His poetry—"Death Fugue" most famously—pushes back against overwhelming horror and yet, as in the example just quoted, Celan's poems do manage to address and survive forces which should, but do not, negate them. This harrowing acknowledgment of reality, this open-eyed refusal to turn away or be reconciled, is the essence of lyrical will, the source of poetic authority in our time. Only on such terrible terms can spirit maintain its integrity. We saw this, too, in Brecht's poem, and by contrast its absence is the most striking thing about recent American poetry.

Reality, as Henry James put it, is "things we cannot possibly not know." To this we might add Walter Pater's dictum that art deals not with fact but with our sense of fact. Among the things or facts which currently determine our sense of ourselves and the world, we must include our own nation's sponsorship of the blood bath in El Salvador, the murder of black children in Atlanta, the State Department's determination to provoke a small war in which some, at least, of our sons must fall. Things like these, not to mention the increasing threat of nuclear wipeout, or the feeling for radical evil we got from the Final Solution, do affect our lives and alter

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how we feel about being in the world. They create permanent anxiety, moral disgust, distrust of the future, and thereby rob us of strength and rightful joy. They surely shatter the governing principle of American poetry—that "The Universe is the externization [*sic*] of the soul"—which is the Emersonian formula underlying poetic practice that values the world beyond the self only so far as it can be turned to private metaphor.

Poetry transcends the actual by encounter, not by evasion or innocence, and when forms keep us at a distance from our own experience they are bound to wane in vigor. The predicament of poetry in America is that its own tradition forbids contact with social and political reality, with what poets themselves *know*, contact which might release enormous resources for the regeneration of poetic will. Obviously the solution is not to incorporate a political stand, not to use art for programmatic ends, nor even, necessarily, to write directly about events and situations which keep the climate of violence white hot. As Seamus Heaney reminds us via Yeats, what we need are "befitting emblems of adversity," nothing more, but likewise nothing less. With the exception of Brecht, the group of poets I have been referring to could not be called "committed." They would agree with Auden that poetry makes nothing happen, but also that the mad world hurts us into poetry, and finally that

> Even a limerick
> ought to be something a man of
> honor, awaiting death from cancer
> or a firing squad,
> could read without contempt. . . .

Either poetry counts or it doesn't. We cannot have it both ways like certain scholar-critics who insist that poetry is an art unto itself with no bearing on life, but who also insist that the humanities, of which poetry is one, are a source of spiritual benefit indispensable to moral maturity. Of course poetry counts, and we are right to expect from it nourishment and fortitude, as well as insight and pleasure. *As You Like It* and *King Lear* are works of equal genius, but I would argue that the comedy increases in value because we have the tragedy. The aim of art, as Samuel Johnson said, is to help us the better to enjoy life, or the better to endure it. In times like ours, we shall not much enjoy what we cannot well endure. □

Is Television a Space to Hide?

RICHARD GILMAN

THE CAMERA AGE: Essays on Television. *By Michael J. Arlen. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 337 pp. $13.95.*

THE CRYSTAL BUCKET. *By Clive James. Jonathan Cape. 192 pp. $11.95.*

In the introduction to his new collection of writings on television, Michael Arlen, who has skills much broader than his job usually calls for, speaks of the "huge, shared, strangely experienceless experience" of watching TV. In another place he says that "television is hard to pin down, almost impossible." Later he speaks of the medium as "porous," "permeable" to a high degree, by which I take it he means that one's attention goes right through nearly everything TV presents and out the other side, with nothing remaining for the mind or memory. He asks, "Is television . . . a window on the world? Or is it a space we have found to hide in from the twentieth century?" And in the most open avowal of his doubts about both his profession and its subject, he writes: "Every so often some dismal weeks turn up where there seems to be even less of interest than usual on the TV screen, and little point in being a so-called critic of television programs, and, indeed, slight social value in the fact of television itself."

I suspect such weeks turn up for Arlen more often than he can admit. This is his third volume of essays on and reviews of TV, and the note of despair, muted though it still is, has grown increasingly audible. In his first book bringing together his *New Yorker* pieces, *Living-Room War* (1969), he had the advantage of an important continuing subject: the way TV was presenting—distorting and denaturing—

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the war in Vietnam. That war was, of course, a nightly intrusion or *divertissement* in most American homes, and its presence on TV became its existence in most American minds. Television's rendering of the war, though accurate enough on the surface, avoided all deeper sense of judgment. Arlen's running commentary on the conflict was a quiet, thoughtful, even noble act of perception and demurrer, a corrective both during the fact and after it.

His second collection, *The View From Highway 1,* came out in 1976 and was, at least in part, animated and sustained by the war in its closing years and aftermath. And in that book, his master-subject fading, Arlen's uneasiness about the value of what he was doing rose. In a plaintive remark that testifies to his sense of the discrepancy between the order of reality and that of TV reality in its news-gathering or reportorial function, he says: "We witness the world through television. Though sometimes I have the feeling that events of the utmost importance take place, untelevised, beneath one's nose, or at least on sidewalks as one's car glides past."

In the new book, covering the last five years of his column, the war has no more place. And so I imagine Arlen asking himself, what subject do I have now, apart from the broad shapeless one of TV itself, what notion might tie together these regularly appearing pieces, this record of viewing? The title suggests what he has settled on—an idea, unexceptionable if not especially fertile, of the camera as dominating our era, influencing our perceptions when it isn't actually creating them, more and more substituting a "look" of things for their truth. The technology of movies, and especially of TV, holds full sway, at the expense of intelligence, imagination and feeling. And this is true of TV even in its reportorial mode. "Television anchormen," Arlen writes, "like the great stone heads on Easter Island, have had their day. This is the day of the modulating engineers: the cutters, splicers, mixers, editors, and so on."

Now to say that Arlen's notion of "cameras in command" (the title of the book's first essay) isn't particularly fecund is not to denigrate him but only to express my own sense of the limitations of TV criticism. For as I read these pieces I was alternately impressed by Arlen's humaneness, good sense and modest, graceful style, and distressed by what results from these qualities: the essential superficiality, *as criticism,* of what he does. By this I mean that there is really not much criticism going on here, as the word and practice have traditionally been understood: there's very little exegesis or explication, and there isn't any dwelling within works nor any building of bridges from them to potential readers or viewers.

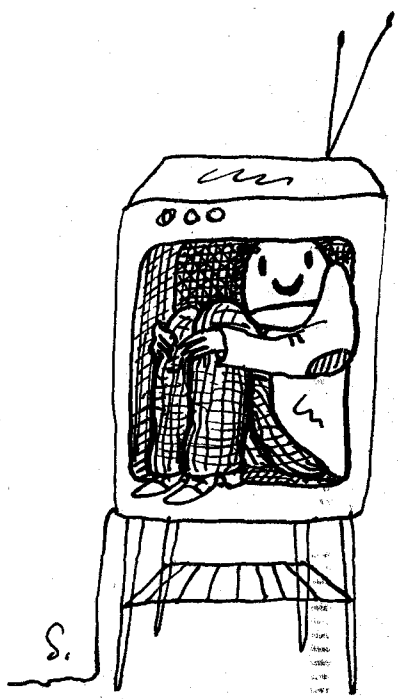
Part of this is obviously due to the transitory nature of the things Arlen sees, the fact that they're in oblivion before his words about them can appear. But this is the same condition that confronts the critic of dance or music in performance, yet those arts have a substantial body of criticism attached to them. More central to Arlen's dilemma, or frustration, is the porousness of the medium he's painfully noted. Unlike film, which is so much more versatile and many-leveled, TV seems to have no esthetic principles at any time, merely technical ones; the mind slips through because what we're being shown—I'm talking about all TV "drama"—hasn't really been imagined but *put together.* Nothing's been won in a struggle with chaos, nearly everything is ready-made, in the exact sense of the term.

More than that, TV's very lack of history and its consequent lack of a tradition of criticism has the effect of reducing its critics to an almost amateurish level, to a groping for principles or precedents such as have long been available to critics of the established arts. I mean they're amateurish when it comes to matters of art or imagination; in regard to moral or political questions they can be as sophisticated as anyone else. And that is fundamentally what a reviewer like Arlen does best: comment on and judge the ethics of television and its politics, or rather its effect on politics. This is possibly an important role (except that one knows Arlen's audience is already largely in agreement with him, that it isn't an audience that needs educating). But it isn't criticism as I know it.

When Arlen does make a rare effort to consider seriously the esthetic, or at least the formal, nature of some genre, his vocabulary and perceptions seem naïve. In his essay on TV melodrama he speaks of a made-for-TV movie and says that it "never really develops impact as melodrama, because one can't get involved in the emotional life of any of the characters." But melodrama as a theatrical mode has never rested on such involvement and indeed would undercut itself if it did. What melodrama solicits is an involvement in *situations,* not souls; this is its precise difference from serious drama.

The best offerings in the book are of a public service kind: an essay on the growing unreality of films (both for movie theaters and TV) that loudly purport to be celebrating the real; a comparison of the Academy Awards telecast and similar occasions to a ritual like Queen Victoria's funeral procession; strictures on docudrama as being neither fish nor fowl, and, the one essay where Arlen becomes enthusiastic, his homage to the cranky, unaccommodating documentary film maker Frederick Wiseman. In his most curious essay, Arlen speculates that watching TV is analogous to masturbation, a thesis which may be correct but which falls far short of being convincing here.

For the rest, Michael Arlen soldiers on, literate, civilized, responsible, uncomfortable and a little embarrassed. To preserve his sanity, or at least his morale, one imagines, he intersperses his reviews with little fictional efforts of his own: an "Ode to Thanksgiving," that dismaying holiday when football drones on the set while the family struggles for conviviality, and a story called "Stunt Man," "written after watching one too many TV shows and TV movies in which the protagonists appear to be various types of motor vehicles and their drivers." He is an admirable man doing unenviable work.



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Clive James seems to have none of the misgivings that assail Arlen. He is, I'm told, the most admired television critic in England, his weekly column in *The Observer* having much the same sort of rabid "in" following that Pauline Kael has, or maybe used to have, here. In fact, as a writer, James resembles Kael in many unpleasant ways. They have the same sort of viciousness, even sadism, the same more than ordinary interest in the scatological, the same itch to score off their material by exercises of wit. And both have turned to their account the "trashiness" of so much of what they see by sharing it as a kind of joke with their readers.

James is undeniably amusing. I offer a little anthology of his wit, malicious and otherwise:

> [Perry Como gave] his usual impersonation of a man who has been simultaneously told to say "Cheese" and shot in the back with a poisoned arrow.
>
> •
>
> It needed Lindsay Anderson, director of *The Old Crowd*, to bring out a quality in Alan Bennett's writing which had hitherto lain dormant—crass stupidity.
>
> •
>
> I believe most of what Jane Fonda believes. In fact I believed most of it before she did. But after you have heard a few of your liberal opinions coming out of Jane's mouth you start wondering whether the John Birch Society is so bad after all.

He can strain for his wit, too. Thus "Wuthering Depths," "Bonjour Twistesse," "Women's Lab" (about Marie Curie). And thus "Karen Kain, a Kanadian—sorry, Canadian, ballerina. . . ."

But though James is lively and, one has no doubt, accurate enough in his judgments of the undemanding objects he views, his hectic glitter tends to hurt the eyes after a while and, what's worse, his intellectual limitations start to hurt the mind. Thus when he turns "serious" he will say the following things: "First-rate artists usually think as well as feel." "There is no secret about why soap operas make compulsive television. They simplify life." "On the whole *Roots* is an achievement for America to be proud of."

In a review of an earlier volume of his pieces, a critic said in *The Times* of London that "Mr. James makes the programmes so much more enjoyable than they can ever have been to watch." This is a kind of glory, I suppose, but isn't it also more than a hint at the extreme inconsequence of the medium? For critics like Clive James, TV is a pretext. □

Audacity Is Not Required

TAMAR JACOBY

NOVEMBER. *By Rolf Schneider. Translated by Martin Bullock. Alfred A. Knopf. 202 pp. $10.95.*

There is only one moment of certainty and decisive action in this new novel by the East German writer Rolf Schneider. The poet and songwriter Arnold Bodakov has been deprived of his citizenship and refused permission to return to East Berlin after a brief trip to the West. Natasha Roth learns of this on the telephone from one of her publishers—the one across the border in West Berlin. She watches the evening news on television, on the East German stations but also on several programs transmitted from the West. There Bodakov is shown as something of a hero, a man determined to criticize injustice in his country no matter what the personal cost. Natasha is so preoccupied that she neglects to make dinner for her husband and two children. She stays up most of the night, drinking Polish vodka and switching from channel to channel, looking for news about Bodakov. In the morning she drives to the apartment of Bodakov's mistress, Rebecca, where she finds a group of four other well-known writers. Together they draft a statement defending Bodakov and protesting the Government's action. For a moment, Natasha feels hopeful, even triumphant. She returns home buoyed by a strange gaiety.

A few days later the same group of writers meet again in Rebecca's apartment. They grin and talk about the "unexpected success" of the letter, which has been much publicized in both the Eastern and Western press. They congratulate themselves on their courageous action. And yet Natasha is troubled: "Everyone in the room spoke very

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loud. As she listened, Natasha Roth suspected that the emotions roused by this gathering were somewhat inappropriate and artificial." Already she fears that there is something hollow about their gesture, something futile in their faith that they as writers could serve as the conscience of their country.

Schneider writes from some experience as a dissident East German author. Natasha's defense of Bodakov will remind many readers of the letter of protest signed by Schneider and Christa Wolf and some dozen other East German writers when the Marxist balladeer Wolf Biermann was deprived of his citizenship in November 1976. Since then many of the intellectuals who protested on his behalf have lost their jobs or been blacklisted by publishers. Several have left the country voluntarily; others have been expelled. Schneider was among the authors excluded from the East German Writers' Association, and as a result he can no longer earn a living by publishing in East Germany. He can also be prosecuted if he accepts payment from an editor in the West for rights to a manuscript that has not been approved by a Government bureau in East Berlin. *November* was among the first manuscripts rejected by this bureau when it was established in 1979. The East German Deputy Minister of Culture has also called the novel a "pernicious" work, "beneath discussion." It will not be published in the German Democractic Republic, although many East Germans will read the edition printed across the border in Hamburg.

All the more surprising, then, is the quiet, thoughtful writing in *November*, the absence of bitterness or rancor or shrill polemical ideas. Schneider writes with solemn precision, sometimes from Natasha's point of view, sometimes from the perspective of her 15-year-old son, Stefan. And the novelist staunchly refuses to cast his story as either a melodrama or a simple moral fable. Bodakov is less heroic than sniveling and egotistical, driven by self-pity; Natasha is horrified by his sentimental protest writing and by other opportunistic poseurs who pass for dissidents in East Berlin. The Government's reaction to the Bodakov letter is neither violent nor particularly frightening, and Natasha herself is never openly harassed. Her *crise de conscience* takes place in a familiar, domestic world, one of the many crises that disturb the family that year: Stefan's bicycle accident, his paralysis and slow recovery, Natasha's discovery that her husband is seeing another woman, their separation and divorce. There is almost no rhetoric in the novel, not even in the mouths of the characters themselves, no ideological discussion. About her decision to sign the Bodakov protest, Natasha says only, "If I had done nothing, I should be feeling worse." Schneider deals in moods, symbols and personal gestures—not, on the surface at least, in the substance of political debate.

Natasha's deep political idealism emerges from the fabric of her personal worries and her concern about her writing. Like most of the adult characters in the novel, she can never entirely put aside her memories of the war, never quite separate her perception of other people from her knowledge of what they did under the Nazi regime. No one in *November* mentions Hitler or the Resistance, but there is no mistaking the echoes of German history when Natasha, in speaking about "the past," says obliquely: "That wouldn't have happened if someone had spoken up, perhaps someone like us."

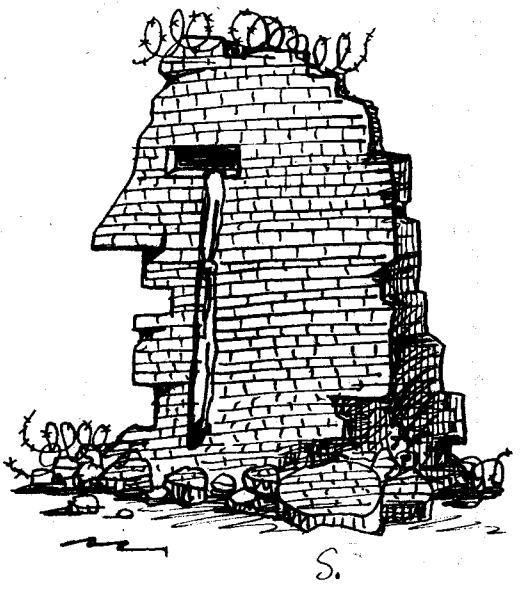
The other "past" that preoccupies her and shapes her political ideas is the world of Rimbaud and the Paris Commune of 1871. She has for some years been trying to write a book about the French poet and his grand conception of the revolutionary artist, his youthful anarchistic dreams of social utopia and poetic freedom. And it is clear even at the time of the Bodakov affair that Natasha's commitment to Marxism has something of the heady extravagance of the French poet's vision. She talks, again obliquely, about "an old Jew, who convinced us of the power of Utopia":

> that Utopia changes reality, even if it remains Utopia. Sometimes I detest the reality we have created. But I can't break free of it. It's like a religion. And I don't want to be an apostate, a heretic. I want to be like a child taking Communion, but I grew up long ago. It's horrible to be grown up.

Slowly, subtly, Schneider traces Natasha's growing confusion, in the months before the Bodakov incident, about the proper social role for artists. She travels to West Germany, where she is much criticized by reviewers for not taking a harder line in what she writes about life in the East. She wonders secretly "whether she should admire Bodakov's ruthlessness and be ashamed of her own conflict-free life." But at the same time she finds his work strident and childishly provocative. "Audacity," she tells a West German reporter, "is not necessarily a sign of literary quality."

There is nothing heroic or righteous about Natasha's participation in the Bodakov protest. She comes to it in a moody despair that has at least as much to do with her crumbling marriage and the writer's block that has stopped her work on Rimbaud as with a sustained or articulate concern for the freedom to write. Her decision to take part in the protest is not a simple political choice or a statement of rational belief. It is for her a much more important kind of gesture: an effort to break through her suffocating personal problems to something larger and somehow more real. She reaches for a concern that she can share, even momentarily, with a group of other writers. And for a time, in the exultation of signing the letter, she even believes that she has found an "antibody" to fight the fear of insignificance that has prevented her from putting words to paper. Schneider writes almost wistfully about the seductive certainty and conviction that comes with making a political protest.

When Natasha's son, Stefan, comes out of the hospital some months after his bicycle accident, he feels exhausted and apathetic, scornful of his childish classmates and isolated by his permanent limp. A quiet, intelligent child with a distant manner, he is the kind of boy who cannot help thinking that perhaps his best friend "was keeping back as much as he was." Schneider shows ex-



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traordinary sensitivity in describing the injured boy's frustration and his sense of special vulnerability, his longing to be like other children who do not read books or look at pictures and whose parents are not in the public eye. Like his mother, Stefan feels privileged and more lucid than other people, and therefore in some uncertain way burdened by responsibility. At times Schneider seems to reach for some analogy between the two stories—between Stefan's adolescent malaise and his mother's growing doubts about the usefulness of her protest. But then perhaps it is not so farfetched to see Natasha's frustration and disillusionment reflected in the boy's violent fantasies: his urge "to yell or piss on the carpet," his visions of death, his conviction that the people around him are trapped in somehow "unreal" and superficial lives.

The weeks after the Bodakov incident bring surprisingly little in the way of Government reprisals. A small construction workers' trailer appears across the street from the house, and there is a visit by "a man from the ministry," who chats quietly with Natasha. Stefan notices that new security guards have been posted at the roadblocks around the city and thinks his mother's car is being followed by motorcycle police. But this, it turns out, is only another fantasy. And then, as the days and weeks pass uneventfully, it slowly becomes clear that what troubles Natasha is people's indifference to the Bodakov affair. No one, not even her closest friends, seems to understand the reasons for her gesture.

She is horrified by students and foreigners who see the protest as a deliberate confrontation with the Government, and shocked by her West German publisher's suggestion that her writing might sell better if it were angrier or more derisive. But even more painful is the accusation that she has been disloyal to her country. She had hoped that the letter would restore what she calls "the dignity" of the Government, reminding East Germans that they are strong enough to tolerate a short book of protest ballads. What troubles her most is that no one seems to share her idealism about the critical revolutionary artist. To many East Berliners her ideals seem little more than another kind of frivolous, bourgeois privilege.

Within weeks after the Bodakov protest, even the other writers who signed the letter have either repudiated it or

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emigrated to the West. Stefan's fantasies become increasingly violent, and the gloom that has been hovering over the family begins to seem almost unbearable. In the last scene, Natasha leaves for Paris, presumably on a short research trip, although it remains uncertain whether or not she will be allowed to return. Here and there in these chapters the gloom is perhaps too thick, and Schneider's sense of proportion seems to give way to a kind of moody self-indulgence. But by the end of the novel it is hard not to be moved by Natasha's melancholy defeat. Like Natasha, Rolf Schneider sees clearly enough that "audacity" and bitterness do not necessarily make for good literature. And yet, as he shows in *November*, it is not impossible to write in a quiet, questioning way about what it is to make a political act. □

A Fierce Conflict of Colors

BRINA CAPLAN

TAR BABY. *By Toni Morrison. Alfred A. Knopf. 306 pp. $11.95.*

Storytelling can disclose the order of the world or, if necessary, invent an order the world lacks. In her previous fiction, Toni Morrison has revealed the structure of rural black communities, small worlds coherent and vital in themselves but precariously isolated within a hostile white culture. More often than not, these communities in isolation have included the supernatural as well as the realistic. In *The Bluest Eye* there is a misanthropic fortuneteller; in *Sula*, symbolic repetitions and predictive dreams; in *Song of Solomon*, fulfilled prophecies and outright magic. Like Isaac Bashevis Singer, who also writes about communities isolated and beset, Morrison seeks to preserve the experienced richness of communal life against an outer world that denies its value. Again like Singer, Morrison turns to a heritage of folklore, not only to disclose patterns of living but also to close wounds. The supernatural events of her fiction represent the strivings of a culture denied, a leap beyond walls of oppressive circumstance. And in that imaginative leap, Morrison seeks to release bonds and to redefine boundaries.

Although *Tar Baby* contains magical presences and ends with intimations of the supernatural, it differs from Morrison's previous work. Here, the small black communities that nourish her mythology are peripheral, displaced by locations that represent the dominant culture: a Caribbean island retreat and New York City. Instead of folk-speech, she gives us speeches; rather than experiencing a heritage, her characters discuss it; rather than expressing communal possibility, they quarrel over the value of racial identity. *Tar Baby* is, in effect, a novel of ideas set in the white world.

Retired candy manufacturer Valerian Street has had a villa built for himself and his wife, Margaret, on a private island in the Caribbean. His architect was Mexican, his workmen black, and the island itself is named for blind slaves who, rumor has it, still ride its far hills. While he sits in an air-conditioned greenhouse, growing Northern plants to classical music ("Bach for germination, Haydn and Liszt for strong sprouting"), two black American servants, Ondine and Sydney, make life in the tropics possible for him—or order local black servants to do so. Valerian's imperial name implies the extent of his rule: labor belongs to others; control, to him.

In dialogue with his wife, his butler and Jadine (his protégée and house guest, but Sydney and Ondine's niece), Valerian reveals sharp wit, "antique grace" and patriarchal generosity. Accompanying these virtues of largess, however, is a moral blankness so complete that for thirty years he has avoided sharing his wife's horrifying guilt: only when Ondine directly accuses her and Margaret openly confesses does Valerian recognize that his young wife compulsively tortured their infant son. Valerian's sin is willful unknowing, and his green world on the Isle des Chevaliers, Morrison implies, has blood-red roots.

Morrison expresses much of the argument of *Tar Baby* through a symbolic conflict of colors. Valerian's stark white and red (the colors of a candy named in his honor and sold chiefly to blacks in the South) confront, in the person of William Son Green, an ethos represented by earth tones: cadmium yellow,

Brina Caplan teaches expository writing at Harvard University.

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tar, Hansa red, the green of his name. An "undocumented" man, who lacks a college degree and a passport, Son is nonetheless an inheritor—of a rural, communal past that "runs like royalty in his veins." He becomes a guest at the villa only on Valerian's whim, for he originally enters it as a crewman who has jumped ship, a nocturnal scavenger seeking food. He stays on, however, because he falls in love with Jadine, Sorbonne graduate student and Paris fashion model.

Having accidentally killed his wife eight years previously, Son hopes to "rescue" Jadine from a living death: her career as "the copper Venus," a commodity of the white fashion industry. And because international success has left her feeling "lonely and inauthentic," she responds. During the dinner-table argument that precipitates Margaret's confession, the absolute standards of both cultural positions become clear: Valerian, "the man who respected industry looked over a gulf" at Son, "the man who prized fraternity." At issue, Morrison insists, is the place of cooperative communal traditions within an overwhelmingly atomistic and competitive society.

And when, after the revealing Christmas dinner, Jade and Son leave Valerian's island for New York City, they bring this conflict with them. Unfortunately for their romance, Jadine relishes the power Valerian's patronage has schooled her to acquire. Yes, in becoming a commodity, one pays a price, but one pays in order to be paid, in dominion if not in cash. "If ever there was a black woman's town," she muses, "New York was it."

> No, no, not over there making land-use decisions, or deciding what was or was not information. But there, there, there and there. Snapping whips behind the tellers' windows, kicking ass at Con Edison offices, barking orders in the record companies, hospitals, public schools. They refused loans at Household Finance, withheld unemployment checks and drivers' licenses, issued parking tickets and summonses. Gave enemas, blood transfusions and please lady don't make me mad. They jacked up meetings in board rooms, turned out luncheons, energized parties, redefined fashion, tipped scales, removed lids, cracked covers and turned an entire telephone company into such a diamondhead of hostility the company paid you for not talking to their operators. The manifesto was simple: "Talk shit. Take none." Jadine . . . loved it all.

Son, however, views it as the devil's own bargain, in which blacks exchange their specific humanity for standardized, machine-made simulations of reality:

> the lion he believed was exclusive to his past—and his alone—was frozen in stone (can you beat it?) in front of the New York Public Library. . . . Like an Indian seeing his profile diminished on a five-cent piece, he saw the things he imagined to be his . . . appropriated, marketed and *trivialized into decor.*

In spite of Jadine's hesitation, he insists that they retreat to Eloe, the tiny village in north Florida where he grew up.

In Eloe, Son is a prince of the earth; Jadine, however, remains a dislocated tourist. There, in nights that seem to her like "a cave, a grave, the dark womb of the earth," she dreams that a mob of country women surround her; all of them, even her own mother, accuse her of betraying her heritage and her sex:

> "I have breasts too," she said or thought or willed. . . . But they didn't believe her. They just held their own higher and pushed their own farther out and looked at her. All of them revealing both their breasts except the woman in yellow. She did something more shocking—she stretched out a

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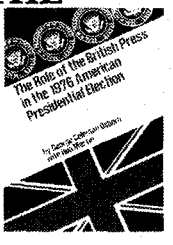

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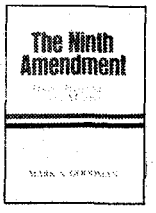

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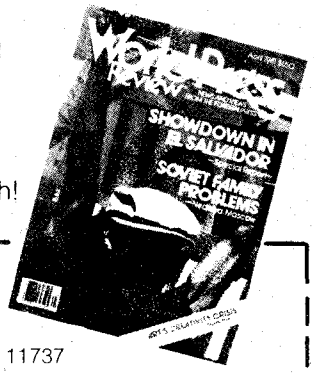

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long arm and showed Jadine her three big eggs.

Eloe's division of male and female roles, the stringent sexual morality of village life, the country conversations "in which the silences meant more than the words," bore or frighten her. The very timelessness of the town robs her of a central achievement, her talent for getting things done "on time."

Whereas the "night women" indicate that the past nourishes the present, Jadine believes she must disavow the past in order to secure her sense of the present. After a few weeks, she draws Son back to New York in order to "rescue" him from "the night women who wanted him for themselves, wanted him feeling superior in a cradle, deferring to him; wanted her to settle for wifely competence when she could be almighty, to settle for fertility rather than originality, nurturing instead of building." In the continuing counterpoint of their arguments, Jadine and Son manage merely to nullify each other. Ultimately, in *Tar Baby*, no one is rescued. "Each knew the world as it was meant or ought to be," Morrison explains. "One had a past, the other a future and each one bore the culture to save the race in his hands."

The novel ends without resolving this opposition of values. At its close, power and interests are distributed as at its outset: Although a stricken Valerian lives in virtual paralysis, in Ondine's words, "'it don't matter'": "'Master, patient, baby. . . . He's still the center of everything.'" Although she and Sydney have expected Jadine to return to them, their niece visits the island to distinguish her future from theirs: she collects her fur coat and departs for Paris. And Son, in a quest more ambiguous than his search for Jadine, also returns to Valerian's island, seeking in a dreamlike fog to join the blind riders of the Isle des Chevaliers. This static hierarchy suggests Morrison's uncertainty about whether fraternity and industry can be reconciled. But if she is uncertain about whether a Son can preserve his heritage in contemporary society, she is utterly clear in her critique of Valerian's red and white world.

Dangerous moral silliness, Morrison concludes, lurks in our contemporary supposition that individuals can be anything they want to be. In *Tar Baby*, Morrison insists that human identity requires foundations other than spontaneous interest or whim, which industry actively elicits and fashion easily seduces. Only shared values, patterns of obligation and cooperation, identification with a specific history and geography, make the self meaningful. Without such connections, a world in which you can be anything you want to be inevitably turns you into an object of commercial manipulation—into a thing, and simultaneously, into nothing at all. When, for example, Son returns to the Caribbean, he is appalled to find a young islander and former friend, Alma Estée, "in a wig the color of dried blood. Her sweet face, her midnight skin mocked and destroyed by the pile of synthetic dried blood on her head." If the peril of living by Son's values is romantic regression, the peril of living by Jadine's seems far more dangerous—a distortion of memory, some version of Valerian's disastrous innocence and its bloody consequences.

Morrison's concerns in *Tar Baby* are race, class, culture and the effects of late capitalism—heavy freight for any narrative. Indeed, their mass may account for the structural braces discernible in the novel: paired conversations and contrapuntal scenes, an allegory of names and places, and a particularly insistent use of color symbolism. After all, she is attempting to stabilize complex visions of society—that is, to examine competitive ideas in what is essentially a novel of ideas.

Undoubtedly, *Tar Baby* is successful as such, but, like most works in that genre, it remains teasingly deficient as a novel of character. Because the primary function of Morrison's characters is to voice representative opinions, they arrive on stage vocal and highly conscious, their histories symbolically indicated or merely sketched. Her brief sketches, however, are clearly the work of an artist who can, when she chooses, model the mind in depth and detail. In acquainting us with Jadine, for instance, Morrison tunnels the experience of a 12-year-old observing the patient surrender of a bitch in heat. Although Morrison uses this incident to explain Jadine's initial fear of Son Green, the rich psychology it suggests flashes by us too quickly and is subsequently abandoned. Morrison simply shifts her attention away from the character's evolution, onto the character's ideas.

This is, of course, a storyteller's prerogative, but novelist Toni Morrison is capable of focusing on both. More to

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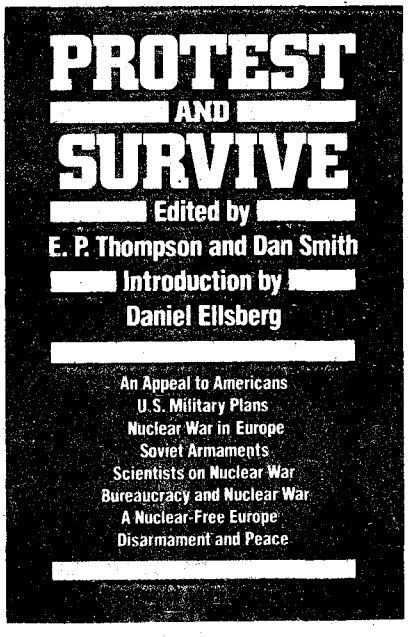

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the point, she has a rare gift for characterization; George Eliot comes to mind as a comparison. Like Eliot, she can compel her readers to learn about themselves by experiencing, through her characters, states of mind that they would ordinarily disavow. In her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, emotion, personal history and social forces produce in Cholly Breedlove a momentary compulsion of character. In that moment, his love for his daughter becomes rape—an aberration dismissed by his community as mindlessly random, but transformed through Morrison's art into a coherent, explicable and desperately human act.

If, in *Tar Baby*, she presses her audience to redefine their thinking, she has elsewhere shown herself capable of forcing them, against the grain of experience, to redefine themselves. □

'Nature's Favourite Resonance'

JOHN SUTHERLAND

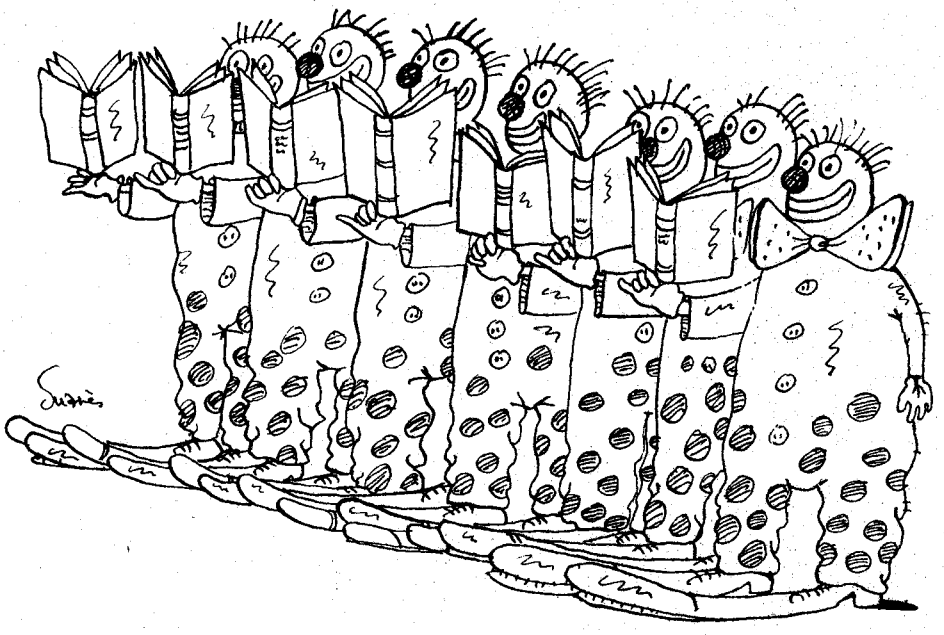
In 1976 a comprehensive guide to British and American *Contemporary Novelists* was prepared by St. James Press, London, and St. Martin's Press, New York. It is a massive volume, more like a building block than a book. Some 1,650 pages long, it represents the efforts of two editors, twenty-nine advisers (all distinguished academics or otherwise literary dignitaries) and 194 contributors. This critical regiment has produced entries on nearly 700 novelists, arranged alphabetically from Ahmad Abbas to Sol Yurick. The comprehensiveness of the work is astonishing; everyone will find authors whom he has never heard of but whose contribution to contemporary fiction is clearly substantial. And equally astonishing is the encyclopedia's omission of novelists one cannot but have heard of but whom the advisers regard as beneath notice. Even a reference work of this extensiveness can find no room for Harold Robbins (with an estimated 200 million sales), Alistair MacLean (with an estimated 150 million sales), Frederick Forsyth (with an estimated 50 million sales), Mickey Spillane (with an estimated 150 million sales), Barbara Cartland (with an estimated 100 million sales), Jacqueline Susann (whose best-selling novel has sold more than 6 million in the United States), or Peter Benchley (whose best-selling novel has sold more than 10 million in the United States).

There are good reasons for this quite typical neglect. Academic and higher-journalism approaches habitually establish a critic/subject to literary object relationship, which the best seller slips out of. The best seller is never static or sufficiently complete in itself for criticism either to get to work on it or to make the work worthwhile. We have no critical vocabulary for applauding the ingenious, polymorphic tie-ins of an otherwise poor novel (its media adaptability), or for congratulating a novelist who writes indifferently—or even appallingly—but promotes his or her book with genius (Jacqueline Susann was a prime example). Above all, criticism has great difficulty in coming to terms with the ephemeral product; there is no good criticism of the best seller for the same reason that there is no good criticism of television; the thing is never around long enough to be engaged. Denied his customary durable object, the reviewer/critic falls back on a kind of Podsnappery ("Not literature!") and saves his time for more worthwhile activities.

Yet, for some purposes, the utility of best sellers lies in the very fact that they often have no literary merit to distract us. We are not therefore detained by any respect for their sanctity as "texts." Nor are we automatically led to think of them as finished products in their own right; instead, we can view them as integrated and dependent parts of a frankly commercial machinery, itself the product of a particular society at a particular period of history. Seen in this way, the best-selling novel may be reckoned as subordinate to other parts of the manufacturing and consuming system—such as the publicity which helps sell it, the author's "image" or the public's "needs." One is rarely tempted to detach the best seller from the specific conditions of its typically brief best-selling existence. And what is useful about such culturally embedded works is what they tell us about the book trade, the marketplace, the reading public and society generally at the time they have done well. There is a hand-in-glove relationship between the best seller, its time and its productive apparatus. Withdrawn from this relationship, Pop lit perplexes us: why, one wonders, should close to 2 million otherwise sensible Americans in 1972 have wanted to buy *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*? Answers can only be found by looking at the historical and book trade circumstances in which Richard Bach's book "made it."

According to Walter Bagehot, it is only by a certain firmly held and widespread idiocy that modern society keeps itself going:

> I fear you will laugh when I tell you that what I conceive to be about the



John Sutherland is a Reader in English at University College, London. This article is adapted from Bestsellers: Popular Fiction of the 1970s, *to be published in June by Routledge & Kegan Paul.*

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> most essential quality for a free people, whose liberty is to be progressive, permanent, and on a large scale; it is much *stupidity*. . . . In fact, what we opprobriously call stupidity, though not an enlivening quality in common society, is nature's favourite resonance for preserving steadiness of conduct and consistency of opinion.

A whole range of sustaining and (largely) amiable Anglo-Saxon stupidity is openly displayed in its best-selling fiction. We are daily bombarded with gloomy news, and most of the population live lives of quiet desperation. Nevertheless, best sellers invariably have upliftingly happy or providential endings. The enemy may be at the gate, but in our novels the shark is killed, the hijack foiled, the plague narrowly averted, the demon exorcised, civilization as we know it saved from innumerable close-run things. There are 2 million unemployed in Britain, but novels like Arthur Hailey's resolutely continue to celebrate the noble fulfillments and unbounded opportunities of the "little man."

"Frighteners" and "Nazism resurgent" fantasies (a few of which deviate by having ominous or ambiguous endings) perform a subtler and less blatantly escapist trick. So do the disaster scenarios and Paul Erdman's international finance melodramas. In these best-selling works, the complex social and economic technicalities of the world are converted into the comfortably primitive formulations of human motivation (greed and will to power, in Erdman's case) or demonology. Since 1945 the Western world has lived only four minutes away from the nuclear annihilation which man has prepared for himself. But the disasters with which best-sellerdom terrifies us are typically "natural," not of our making: flood, fire, earthquake.

Even where they touch on "real" social problems in an "enlightened" frame of mind, the tendency is for best sellers to be safely behind the times. The muck they rake is never fresh, the causes they espouse never genuinely new. Thus a work like Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* comes in, fists flailing, when the fight for female emancipation has moved to other arenas. Novels such as hers and Erica Jong's do not, as advertisements impudently claim, "change lives." Insofar as they have a useful function it is in serving to domesticate alien, life-changing social ideas for the mass of the population, just as Michael Crichton's superdocumentaries domesticate new and life-changing technology. Essentially these works have much the same appeal as the pure romance which they affect to oppose (bodice rippers and Westerns, for instance). They are anodynes. They soothe. No one could guide his life by the codes, awareness and information which best sellers furnish. But they clearly make life more livable for millions of British and American consumers.

Potentially, the best seller is a powerful instrument for social change, instruction or enlightenment. In the past, some popular novels have undoubtedly realized that potential. One thinks automatically of *Uncle Tom's Cabin, The Jungle, The Grapes of Wrath*. But there are few recent cases where a best seller has led, rather than followed, progressive thought. And in the supersellers of the 1970s there are no exceptions to record. These pre-eminently successful novels provide much in the way of thrills and excitement, but nothing in the way of serious intellectual, moral or social disturbance of received stupidity.

Potentially, too, the best seller is a huge resource for the student—whether his discipline is history, literature or sociology. But here, again, it has not been exploited as it might have been.

At least in America, cultural critics have got to the stage of setting up the board with a guide to research. In Britain, academic ignorance and incuriosity about best sellers seem complete and self-willed. I have been surprised, for instance, to discover that the British Library, the major research facility of the nation, does not apparently exercise its copyright deposit options on many "ephemeral" novels of the day (notably, as far as I can discern, on "paperback originals"). One charitably assumes that this is an institutional form of Bagehot's benign "stupidity." But if prejudices change, much of the surrounding undergrowth of our current best-sellerdom will be very hard to come by in fifty years' time.

Prejudices will change, I think. Attention will surely be drawn to the best seller if only because of the extraordinary commercial dynamism it has recently manifested. The gross increase in the consumption of novels, and the emergence of 10 million sellers in the United States and 2 million sellers in

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the United Kingdom, indicate a new and rather terrifying mature phase of the paperback revolution. The sales apparatus of best-sellerdom (lists, hype, tie-ins) is now enormously rationalized. Best sellers are produced with consummate efficiency, and on scales which we have never witnessed before. Such efficiency and magnitude will be hard to ignore for much longer. □

To Babi Yar and Beyond

THOMAS FLANAGAN

THE WHITE HOTEL. *By D. M. Thomas. The Viking Press. 256 pp. $11.95.*

This novel by the English poet D. M. Thomas is a book of extraordinary beauty, power and audacity—powerful and beautiful in its conception, audacious in its manner of execution. It is as stunning a work of fiction as has appeared in a long while. If it falls short of its ambitions, as I believe it does, this is because those ambitions are so large.

Its most obvious, although not its deepest, originality is one of form. The novel is an account of the life and death and the state of being after death of an opera singer named Lisa Erdman, but the account is not given in straightforward narrative. Thomas, however, is not one of those writers who, having been informed by the hum of the general culture that "narrative" has fallen from favor, has looked about for more modish equivalents. His form issues directly from his vision, is compelled by his vision, and has two distinct but closely joined consequences for the reader. It becomes literally impossible to respond to the novel without making crucial decisions as to the events and meanings of Lisa's life—without, that is, disentangling the submerged narrative from the manner of its telling, the shifting viewpoints and chronologies, the rich and shifting imagery.

Lisa Erdman's "biography," told as straightforward narrative, would read something like this: she is born in Russia of a Jewish father and a Polish Catholic mother, becomes a singer, has an affair with a young radical, moves to Vienna and marries. She separates from her husband at the time of World War I and comes to experience hysterical pains in breast and ovary so debilitating that she turns for relief to psychoanalysis, becoming one of Freud's patients.

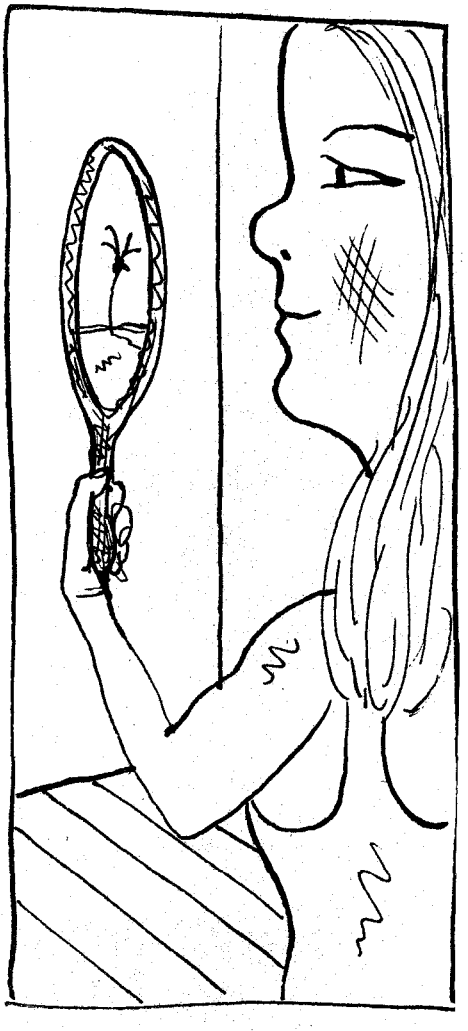
The pains are in the left breast and the left ovary, which puzzles Freud, for he knows that "the unconscious is a precise and even pedantic symbolist." This puzzle aside, Thomas's imagined but authentic Freud explores Lisa's damaged psyche gently, resourcefully, peeling back layer after layer of screening memories and resistances, and bringing her at last to a childhood vision of mother, aunt and aunt's husband, locked in erotic union.

Freud obtains something like a partial remission of her symptoms, and she goes on to an undistinguished singing career, brightened by a solitary success at La Scala. Much later, the baritone with whom she had sung there in *Eugene Onegin* summons her back to Kiev, to marry him and to care for his young son, Kolya. He is swept away in one of Stalin's purges, and she endures in poverty. Then, in 1941, she and Kolya, with numberless thousands, are slaughtered by the Nazis in the dreadful ravine of Babi Yar. Her death is gruesome and obscene: an S.S. man crashes his jackboot into her left breast, and a Ukrainian guard ends matters by driving a bayonet into her womb in a travesty of intercourse. After that, though, she finds herself in a Palestine which is not quite the actual Palestine—peaceful and humdrum, despite olive trees and palms and oases, at once matter-of-fact and eerie—where she meets her dead mother and Kolya, and sees, at a distance, Freud himself.

But we experience the novel with the events ordered differently, and presented in a series of disparate textures. It opens with a series of letters by Freud and his younger colleagues, one written in 1909, others in 1920 after he has begun treatment of Lisa. One of these contains a kind of "journal" in verse, written by his patient after a brief holiday at the resort in Gastein, and set down between the staves of a score of *Don Giovanni*. It is accompanied by an "analysis" which he had urged her to write in "a restrained and sober manner," but which is in fact a wild, lyrical, irrational embroidery upon her original fantasy.

These two documents create with hallucinatory energy and vividness a white hotel, within which the writer experiences moments that fuse an intense eroticism and an equally intense violence. They remain in our mind throughout what follows, not only because of their overwhelming immediacy but because they articulate images—of breast, leaf, blood, fire, milk—that appear and reappear later, with shifting yet accumulating significances.

They are followed in the text by Freud's study of his patient, *Frau Anna G.*, which was to have been published in Frankfurt in 1932, to honor both Goethe's centenary and the fortieth anniversary of his own *Studies in Hysteria*. With the coming of the Nazis, however, the project was abandoned. A footnote reminds us that his works were burned on a bonfire in Berlin—one of



Thomas Flanagan, author of The Year of the French *(Holt, Rinehart & Winston), is at work on his second novel.*

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the novel's many fires, some real and some hallucinated. The "study" is a model of affectionate impersonation, capturing both Freud's civilized, humane, even faintly philistine social attitudes and his daring, courageous understanding of the individual psyche. Within it, Lisa Erdman's fantasy of the white hotel, with its blissful images of oral gratification, its violently destructive counterimages, is artfully joined to her painfully remembered past. The white hotel unlocks for her what she perhaps remembers as happening long ago in a summer house in Odessa, and the "case" is "solved." The hotel, which "speaks in the language of flowers, scents, and tastes," is the place without sin, the body of the mother. From this study, the novel moves forward to a deceptively conventional third-person narrative that carries Lisa to Babi Yar and beyond.

By then, however, the reader has been made uneasily aware—by image, symbol, reference, by the novel's very structure—that far more has been at stake than Lisa Erdman's damaged psyche. The fate of our culture has been implied—a culture which has embraced a Mozart, a Goethe, a Pushkin, a Freud, but also a Hitler, a Stalin, the bayonet of a Ukrainian guard. Lisa has been presented as a woman of average impulses and affections—her history no more bizarre than the secret psychic history of any of us—and of only average, unreflecting intelligence. The history of our age has touched her life at each of its stages, indeed her life is destroyed by our history, but that history has not touched her conscious mind.

It has its image, however, within her unconscious, although, of course, neither Freud nor she herself is aware of this. The full weight of the novel rests upon this irony. Freud's insights, so the novel implies, can carry us to the very edge of what can be apprehended and conquered by the rational, humane intellect. But those very symbols that have yielded themselves to the rational intellect also bear meanings, significations, prophecies, which lie beyond the humane and must be called, for want of better words, spiritual, demonic, angelic. Neither Lisa Erdman nor her supremely rational physician can know that her breast and ovary ache not from a remembered sorrow but from a violation which lies waiting in her, and our, future. Still less can they know, or would they believe, that the mother's consoling breast, the white hotel, awaits her after death, by the waters of Jordan.

This expansion of imagery and structure from the fate of an individual to the fate of the culture itself is a dazzling accomplishment, but it has exacted a price. To persuade us of its authenticity, Thomas has gifted Lisa Erdman with what Freud calls telepathic powers. She herself calls it second sight—an ability to discern in others anxieties that lie below the level of consciousness, to foresee, without understanding, the future. By this device, Thomas hopes to validate the meanings of his symbols as not merely private but communal and, ultimately, apocalyptic. But the device remains a device, a willed literary artifice that demands, but cannot fully claim, our assent. And at the end we are left with a "solution" more esthetically satisfying, perhaps, than that of the rational psychologist, but just as arbitrary. Thomas is no less imprisoned by the conditions of his art than was Freud by his. His deepest theme, the joined threads of desolation and joy, is communicable only through images that are mute save in their power and their beauty, his "explanation" imperils both of these qualities.

The White Hotel seeks to fuse the sufferings of an individual with the horrors of this unspeakable century, and to suggest, by radiance of image and form, that all of them can be confronted. It is an impossible ambition, or at least so it

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must seem to those who, like myself, cannot accept, even as metaphor, a River Jordan flowing somewhere, somehow, beyond the sandpits of Babi Yar. But D. M. Thomas has come wonderfully close. □

'No Such Territory Left'

PETER SCHRAG

AWAKE IN A NIGHTMARE. *By Ethan Feinsod. W.W. Norton & Company. 224 pp. $14.95.*

IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE: The Story of the Layton Family and the Reverend Jim Jones. *By Min S. Yee and Thomas N. Layton (with Deborah Layton, Laurence Layton and Annalisa Layton Valentine). Holt, Rinehart & Winston. 384 pp. $13.95.*

OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HELL: The Life and Death of Jim Jones. *By James Reston Jr. Times Books. 338 pp. $14.95.*

JOURNEY TO NOWHERE: A New World Tragedy. *By Shiva Naipaul. Simon & Schuster. 320 pp. $13.95.*

THE CHILDREN OF JONESTOWN. *By Kenneth Wooden. McGraw-Hill Book Company. 238 pp. Paper $4.95.*

> It didn't take me long to make up my mind that these liars warn't no kings nor dukes at all, but just low-down humbugs and frauds.
>
> —*Huck Finn*

The story of Jim Jones and his People's Temple is the classic American joke—the tall tale, the con artist's hustle of the greenhorn just off the boat, the Amos 'n' Andy routine—turned on its demonic head. One can dismiss the blind willingness of Jones's followers to believe in the possibility of some Christian "Communist-socialist" egalitarian utopia as merely the product of excessive liberal American idealism. But what are we to do with the record of a blasphemous preacher who claimed to turn water into wine, who conducted phony public healing sessions complete with rotting chicken entrails that were displayed as the cancerous tissue that his "paranormal" powers had caused the heretofore afflicted to "pass," and who claimed that his extraordinary sexual prowess enabled him to perform for eight hours or more without respite? It wasn't simply that Jones had fatally conned the 900-odd people who, in November 1978, were to die with him in the Guyanese jungle. Until the very end he had also managed to take in a large proportion of the liberal politicians in California, and a good many elsewhere. All this despite the brutality directed against errant members of the inner circle, Jones's sexual exploitation of the women around him and a record of lies and deception that was clear, if not blatant, long before he removed the Temple to Guyana in 1977.

In the attempt to answer the dreadful questions raised by the People's Temple catastrophe—as, in some measure, each of these books does—both the liberal and the California elements are important. California, as Joan Didion said long ago, is where we run out of continent: Jonestown was, in more ways than one, the last American frontier. But if it was, in that sense, the macabre end of the Indiana version of the California dream, Jones's special exemption from closer scrutiny derived at least in part from the left-wing tilt of his pitch and the (often genuine) social welfare orientation of his program. He really did take care of poor people (in exchange for their government checks), really offered them something to hope for. No one had ever worked a socialist hustle before; our Elmer Gantrys did not promise egalitarian communities free of racism, sexism and war. Nearly all of them were more conventionally self-serving; certainly they were not possessed of the megalomaniacal obsessions that gripped the Rev. Jim Jones. Thus they were both less dangerous while they were at large and easier to find out as the hustlers they were. They were, in fact, the very essence of the classic joke.

Jones, however, was a true innovator. He managed to take the hallelujah evangelism of the (largely black) fundamentalist tradition—from which most of his followers came—and pastorize it with the wrecked hopes of the 1960s and (even more significantly) the Mad.-Ave.-liberal-encounter-group gobbledygook into which those hopes had begun to deteriorate. He managed, in a sense, to use the clichés of one hustle to bolster those of another. Jones was extremely useful politically to people like San Francisco Mayor George Moscone, for whom he provided a large number of cheap campaign workers and several thousand crucial votes. Yet even if he hadn't been of such use, it still would probably have taken many more stories of abuse and exploitation than were then in general circulation to destroy the comforting image that Jones and his loyal inner circle had created for his organization. Having originally moved his flock from Indiana in search of a place that would be relatively safe in a nuclear attack (chosen from a list published in *Esquire*), he offered his liberal followers escape from the increasingly unpleasant social and political realities of the 1970s. A lot of people needed to believe Jones was the savior he claimed to be.

Over the years, and particularly in the year and a half in Jonestown, Jones and his followers grew crazier together. Contemplating his growing paranoia—about the U.S. Government, the courts, the Central Intelligence Agency, the press and, toward the end, the armed attackers he believed, or pretended to believe, were lurking in the jungle just beyond his camp—one is reminded of Nietzsche's dictum that "he who fights with monsters should be careful lest he thereby become a monster." They had rehearsed at least once for what Jones called (in mistaken imitation of Huey Newton's phrase) "revolutionary suicide"; when the call was finally issued, most of them were probably so exhausted from Jones's constant harangues, so

Peter Schrag is editorial page editor of the Sacramento Bee *and author of, among other books,* Mind Control *(Pantheon).*

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demoralized by his impositions, so detached, physically and psychologically, from all reality that the murder-suicide must have been almost a relief, the death they then seemed all to have been living for. Yet it's also likely that, until those last few hours, most of the faithful were probably less possessed by his madness than incapacitated by a more general psychological and linguistic paralysis that made them, like so many others in America, unable to exercise any effective critical judgment.

It's significant that Odell Rhodes, whose story is simply, almost ingenuously told by Ethan Feinsod in *Awake in a Nightmare*, and who was one of the few Ishmaels to save himself from this Ahab's disaster, was a black streetwise hustler from Detroit who recognized Jones's con and was thus able to maintain enough distance to hide himself just as the cyanide was being dished out. Unlike many of those who left the Temple before him, Rhodes felt no need to explain or to elaborate about Jones, or, by way of self-exculpation, to make Jones into even more of a demonic force than he really was. Rhodes liked Jonestown—he says he was happy there, and certainly it was better than the life of a heroin junkie in Detroit—but unlike most of the others he never lost his head, and thus never had much need to explain. "If Jones wants to go around killing Congressmen, that's his problem. I got my own problems to worry about. I didn't want to kill the Congressman and I sure as hell didn't want to kill any of the rest of them—so why should I pay for it?"

The only other book among these five that is shaped by the voices of Jonestown participants or their relatives is *In My Father's House: The Story of the Layton Family and the Reverend Jim Jones*. By contrast, it is a confessional account of a family in which a lot of people lost their heads and in which the need to explain is almost boundless. The publisher describes this as "the story of an American family, a tightly-knit nuclear middle-class family—affluent, sophisticated, successful—whose very history, tracing back on one side to Southern colonial America, on the other to European Jewry, embodies the psychological foundation for the elemental human needs that Jim Jones (as well as so many other leaders of fanatical socio-religious cults) was able to exploit."

The book is both more and less. The Laytons were your pre-eminent Jonestown family. Lisa Layton, a German Jewish émigré from Hitler, died in Guyana, though apparently before Jonestown's own holocaust; her daughter Debbie, who had been a member of Jones's inner circle, defected from the Temple a few months before the end; her son, Larry, is under indictment in San Francisco in connection with the murder of Representative Leo Ryan; another daughter Annalisa, hung around the Temple for a while, then dropped out; Larry's first wife was seduced or coerced into divorcing him by Pastor Jones, who then matched him up with another wife whom Jones subsequently also seduced. (The verb is the book's, not mine.) Both women died in Jonestown, as did Debbie's husband.

One can say—in the most conventional terms—that they were all desperately looking for something: Lisa was a Jewish refugee who, once arrived in America, was never again willing to call herself a Jew because "she did not want her children to be Jewish in a non-Jewish society"; her husband, Laurence, was a Quaker who saw nothing wrong in becoming chief of the Army's chemical warfare branch; their children Larry and Debbie grew up in Berkeley in the 1960s where, willy-nilly, they participated in much of what the place then had to offer. Together and separately they all wanted to make this a better world. Together and separately they also had an enormous capacity for self-deception: it's not surprising therefore that their book is loaded with rhetoric about Jones's demonic power—about his "maniacal tyranny," about how he "had emasculated [Larry's] psyche by having sex with both his first and second wives," about how "the Temple had captured Debbie's mind and heart." Like many survivors of such groups, the Laytons have a sizable investment in enlarging the mind-manipulating power of the man in whose cause they so willingly enlisted.

Yet if there are any real clues about the Laytons in this book, they seem to lie elsewhere: first in what the psychiatrists would call the book's flat affect—its lack of passion and judgment (except, of course, about the maniacal Jones), its absence of irony, indeed its

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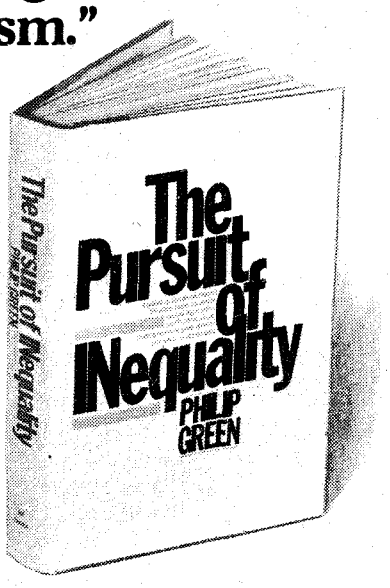

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almost total innocence of any perspective or sense of personal responsibility; second, and perhaps more indicative, in the willingness of these people to tell this sort of intimately personal story about themselves and one another, a story that seems not to blush at any detail of the marital relationship of Lisa and her husband nor of the relationship of the two parents with their children. The nominal chief author of this book, Min Yee, is not a member of the family; he's a professional writer. But it's clear that the book was written to accommodate the wishes of the family, and that, as such, it's difficult to separate its objective from theirs.

The Laytons, of course, were not the tightly knit nuclear family that the blurb talks about, and were certainly not sophisticated. There was a sort of college-educated stupidity here, an ignorance that could not see beyond its sanctimonious do-good snobbery and was thus easy for a political con man like Jones to exploit. But worse, there appears to have been severe moral and cultural damage inflicted on the Laytons long before Jim Jones ever came on the scene, though what terrible things caused it one can't begin to guess. Their book is a fascinating document—fascinating and embarrassing both, a piece of high-class porn that makes the reader a voyeur into other people's intimacies. But one does not come away from it with the story of what happened in the People's Temple; rather it is a series of confessions from a group of infinitely humorless people who still don't seem to understand their responsibility for their own lives or the world in which they live, and who, judging from this book, probably never will.

The essence of the People's Temple story, of course, rests in its lies and deception—deception of self and others—and in the use, abuse and corruption of language, matters about which Shiva Naipaul's *Journey to Nowhere* and James Reston Jr.'s *Our Father Who Art in Hell* are far and away the most revealing yet published. Of the two, Naipaul's is easily the better—a tough, intelligent, beautifully written account of how Californian and Third World illusions fused to set the stage for the disaster in Guyana; in its unyielding sense of irony, it is a welcome antidote for the lobotomized prose of the Layton confessions. In comparison, Reston's is flawed both by uncertain purpose and by an excessive tendency to religious, psychological, social and literary speculations of various obvious sorts, most of which just get in the way.

And yet the two books go together, compensate for each other's flaws, augment each other's strengths, the one about place, the other about time: was it California, was it "the general failures of the 1970s," as Reston suggests, or was it the two together and something more besides? What they both handle so well and so significantly is the language, Reston because he gained access to many of the tapes that the People's Temple routinely made of conversations, meetings and other transactions (including the immolation in Jonestown), Naipaul because he has a flawless ear for the gobbledygook of Third World pretenders, encounter-group gurus, esties, obfuscating politicians and the various other manipulators of rhetoric who populated the world of Pastor Jones. His understanding of the intellectual trash with which he deals is unerring:

> I came to understand [he writes about one est meeting] that in the twenty-first century one was not dealing with the rigors of intellectual struggle but that the intellect was dead and its place taken by a set of shared pathological obsessions which, given the chance, would infect every department of life. Ideas had indeed become viruses.

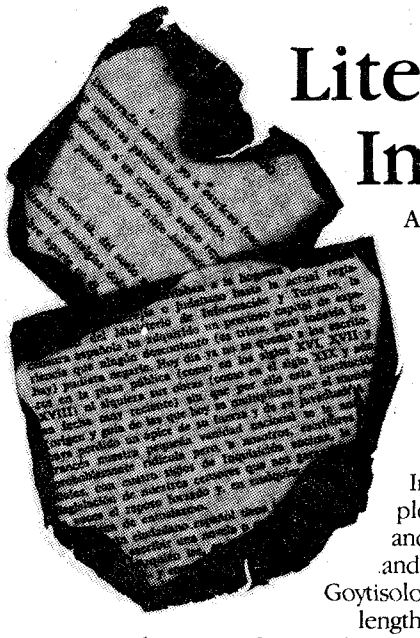
Or again:

> The fundamentalist imagination, feeding on visions of doom, was at work in the Berkeley Community Theater. The people here had not come to learn anything; they had come in search of revelation; they had come to discover how they might save themselves, save mankind, save the world.

Or again (in an interview with a Temple defector):

> She had spent six years in the Temple, quitting in 1975. It was then that she had made the remarkable discovery—under the tutelage of the mind control experts—that neither she nor any of the other reformed disciples bore the slightest moral responsibility for anything untoward they might have done during their Temple years. The burden is entirely Jim's.

In that context of irresponsibility, of intellectual enervation, of moral resignation, it is not only people like the Laytons who become more clearly de-



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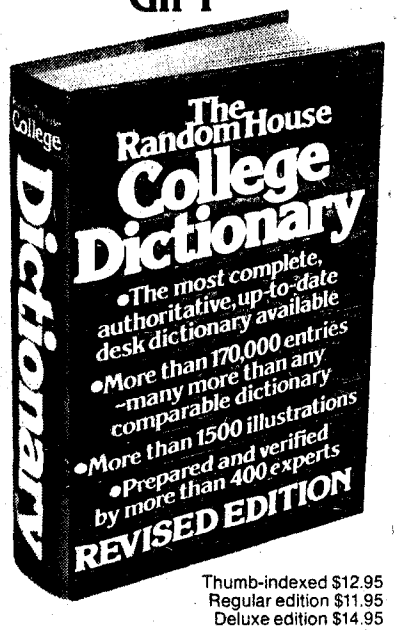
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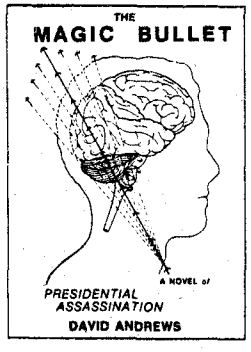

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fined. We begin to comprehend how Jones's followers failed to understand the excesses of their own social expectations as well as the corruption of the language in which the excesses had to be expressed. Inevitably, most of Jones's acolytes never perceived the fatal joke whose butt they were to become.

Reston's book makes clear how much of a tall tale Jonestown really was. Within a few months of his arrival in Guyana, Jones was already casting about for another refuge, concentrating on the Soviet Union with enough seriousness that he ordered everyone at Jonestown to learn Russian and study Marxism. In the ensuing months there would be serio-comic negotiations with a low-level official of the Soviet Embassy in Georgetown, a man eventually described to the faithful as the representative of the "Praesidium" and who, according to Jones, had promised them "that a move against the People's Temple was a move against the Soviet Union." One thing that troubled Jones, apparently, was how, once they had moved to Russia, he could continue to receive and cash his members' Social Security checks. The Russian said not to worry.

It's not surprising that people who could talk so casually about how the Ku Klux Klan and the fascists were taking over America could accept so uncritically the political nonsense that Jones was promising for the future, yet it's still hard to believe how pervasive that nonsense really was. Six months before the main exodus to Guyana, according to Reston, Jones and Lieut. Gov. Mervyn Dymally of California met in Georgetown with Guyana's Prime Minister Forbes Burnham (himself an accomplished political opportunist) in what

> the *Guyana Chronicle* afterward projected [as] a high-level summit. The private meeting centered on the relations between Guyana and the United States, the report said, as if indeed Jones were now serving as the unofficial American ambassador. . . . Following the meeting at the Prime Minister's residence, Deputy Prime Minister Ptolemy Reid hosted a luncheon for Jones and Dymally, to which top Guyanese ministers of state were invited. . . .

After the meeting with Dymally and Burnham, Jones's people took a photo that been taken of the three, cropped out Dymally, and used it prominently in the Temple's promotional material: "Jim Jones meets with Prime Minister Burnham, when Burnham visited Jonestown recently." The king and the duke.

And so we come to the most hopeful of these books, Kenneth Wooden's *The Children of Jonestown*, an angry report about the physical and emotional abuse of children inside the Temple and their neglect by all manner of state, local and Federal officialdom outside. Many of those children had been placed in the foster care or under the guardianship of Temple members by various courts and other public agencies in California. Although most were the natural children of Temple members, Jones had from the very beginning pursued what Wooden calls "a deliberate strategy" to break up families, separating husbands from wives, parents from children and exploiting them all—sexually, emotionally, financially—to maintain more effective control over the members.

Wooden is hardly alone in his anger about those practices, but he seems to be almost unique in his optimistic assumption that had various officials and politicians done their duty—finding out what was happening to foster children who were theoretically still wards of various courts; determining what was being done with thousands of dollars in monthly Social Security checks and foster-care payments; responding to the charges from the so-called Concerned Relatives of Temple members—the massacre might never have occurred.

The case is as strong as it is touching. Set against the nearly forgotten image of murdered children being shipped back anonymously in boxes and buried in common graves, the stench of the official post-massacre denials and cover-ups is particularly odious. And yet, finally, the case is not strong enough: for if one can say that the politicians or the State Department or the welfare bureaucrats of the California Department of Social Services could have prevented the massacre and the abuses that preceded it, one can just as certainly say that it was the inflated expectations of government—in Washington, D.C., in Sacramento, California, in Jonestown—that created the conditions for this disaster in the first place.

Although it surely would be worthwhile still to have the official investigations that Wooden demands (and will never get), just as surely they would lead

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to a conclusion inadequate to the disaster which prompted them. The bureaucrats and the politicians, we would say, have screwed up again, perhaps maliciously to protect their own hides or to do favors for their friends, perhaps just negligently, as they often do. Yet, in the final analysis, it was not just the bureaucrats and the politicians—that usual list of suspects—who made this tragedy but all the wonderful things that those sad, foolish people in Jonestown had been taught to expect of them long before they ever joined the People's Temple, and all the terrible ways that they had learned not to trust themselves. "I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest," says Huck at the end of Mark Twain's book, "because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before." Everybody knows there's no such territory left—that is both the joke of Huck's declaration, the price of his growing up and the tragedy of our condition. We have to make it in this world, not in some other. □

Forgetting Who Are 'The People'

JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN

THE PURSUIT OF INEQUALITY. *By Philip Green. Pantheon Books. 320 pp. $14.95.*

RACIAL INEQUALITY: A Political-Economic Analysis. *By Michael Reich. Princeton University Press. 345 pp. $22.50. Paper $6.95.*

EQUALITY. *By William Ryan. Pantheon Books. 224 pp. $15.95.*

THE AMERICAN NIGHTMARE: The Success Ideal and Work Discrimination. *By Clarice Stasz. Schocken Books. 192 pp. $14.95.*

THE ETHNIC MYTH: Race, Ethnicity and Class in America. *By Stephen Steinberg. Atheneum. 288 pp. $12.95.*

As I worked through this collection of books on equality and inequality, American-style, I found myself haunted by a faintly remembered passage from Richard Wright's posthumously published memoir, *American Hunger.* Unable to still his persistent voice, I hunted for and found the passage in question.

Richard Wright grew up in the Jim Crow South and migrated to the racist North before *Brown* v. *Board of Education*, before Martin Luther King and the 1964 Civil Rights Act, before Affirmative Action. Handicapped by a "triple whammy" in the American sweepstakes as a poor man, a black man and an uneducated man, Wright was a prime candidate for despair, degradation, "negative self-identity," "false consciousness," oppression, exploitation and victimization. Yet he refused to accept this predetermination by forces outside himself. He taught himself to read and to write. He joined the American Communist Party, hoping to find a shared identity and to help make a social revolution to eliminate the conditions that had made him suffer.

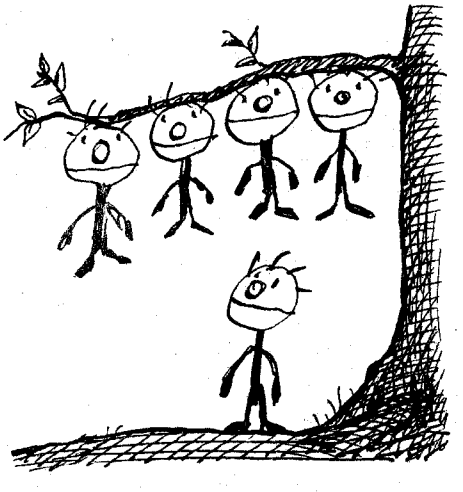
Later, disillusioned and disgusted by his experiences in the party, Wright condemned an ideology that "typed" him from the start. Those immersed in party dogma presumed they knew all there was to know about Richard Wright as the "representative" of an oppressed category, including how and what he ought to write. He should produce political pamphlets; he should cease his restless reading; he should follow the party in conceiving of the people in an abstract manner, rather than attempt to refract the power and meaning of everyday human life through his prose. Groping for a way to understand the party's hatred for him, as a black intellectual, Wright notes in the passage that caught me:

> There existed in the Western world an element that baffled and frightened the Communist party: the prevalence of self-achieved literacy. Even a Negro, entrapped by ignorance and exploitation—as I had been—could, if he had the will and the love for it, learn to read and understand the world in which he lived. And it was these people that the Communists could not understand. . . . This heritage of free thought . . . the spirit of the Protestant ethic which one suckled, figuratively, with one's mother's milk, that self-generating energy that made a man feel, whether he realized it or not, that he had to work and redeem himself through his own acts, all this was forbidden, taboo.

Now I know what the egalitarian's response to this will be. I know because it is a rejoinder I have given myself. It goes something like this: So, Richard Wright made it against all the odds. He's an exception. Somewhere along the line there must have been fortuities in his life, a few breaks that set him on the path toward unique self-accomplishment. Of course, he was gifted and ambitious, too. As a major writer, he's a rarity whether he's black or white. It is the many who are poor and vulnerable, who suffer under discrimination, who live lives of frustration, who face daily indignities, that the egalitarian must keep before the mind's eye, must address, must explain.

All this is so, I would reply, somewhat at a loss, for I share this egalitarian impulse. Yet I fear that too often those of us who call ourselves egalitarians, in our understandable and justifiable urge to improve the lot of the many, forget the distinctiveness of the one; that we, like Wright's blinkered comrades, conceive of "the people" (black, female and poor people as well as white, male and privileged people) in too abstract a manner and that, along the way, we lose a rich notion of the human subject. Should we run roughshod over Emerson's "infinitude of the private self," we will, perhaps knowingly, most often unwittingly, have stripped human beings of their dignity and their capacity for moral agency. Ideally, however, human dignity and agency will not only be respected but will have room to flourish within the egalitarian society. Why, then, am I worried?

I shall explore the promise and pitfalls of egalitarian argumentations by



Jean Bethke Elshtain teaches political theory at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and is a frequent contributor to The Nation.

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bringing my qualms and queasiness into the open. Contemporary egalitarians must come to grips with the sobering fact that they have thus far failed to display in theory and practice a viable vision of an egalitarian society. For most egalitarians, this is pictured as a society that has succeeded in implementing a massive redistribution of power, wealth and privilege, yet has simultaneously protected civil liberties and promoted political democracy. It is one of the strengths of Philip Green's *The Pursuit of Inequality* that he recognizes the daunting problems involved in offering up a coherent egalitarian vision. Green adds that egalitarians, alone among contemporary thinkers, are even trying to work through equality's mind-boggling problems. This is true, but it is also fitting and should not become an occasion for self-congratulation. Egalitarians *must* bear this burden, for it is they alone who, among contemporary thinkers, claim that a political community, organized in and through a state, can be powerful enough to restructure and plan social and economic life in all its aspects: that it can guarantee an ongoing set of egalitarian outcomes, and despite its awesomeness not quash individual rights, eviscerate civil liberties, or destroy political democracy.

My initial reflections revolve around the various views of human nature, the human subject and the individual featured in the background or foreground of these egalitarian arguments. It didn't take long to recognize a rather shapeless figure, familiar to all students of Western liberal thought, lurking in the shadows. I refer to the human being conceived as a blank slate, tabula rasa, who starts off life sans "givens," any stubborn nature of his or her own. Like so much plastic putty, tabula rasa is molded by external forces, or what B.F. Skinner would call the "contingencies of reinforcement."

Society can so readily mold by presuming we have no nature at all and insisting no inborn tendencies exist to deflect, resist, or even reject the processes of socialization. Thus we become infinitely easy to indoctrinate—in theory. This is a point made wittily and well by the philosopher Mary Midgley in her brilliant book, *Beast and Man*. Midgley states that reformers and revolutionaries need this dogma of human indeterminacy "like a hole in the head." She is right. Social engineers and hubris-riddled environmentalists assume they can get any end "product" they like if they subject human raw material to the proper external stimuli and reinforcers. If we are to counter these forces, we must make a cogent case for the fact that human beings possess a nature, that they are not the mere products of social forces. To speak of a human nature is not to leap into the gene pool with biological determinists; instead, it is to recognize and to affirm a rock-bottom human integrity that is both essentially biological *and* irreducibly social.

"I see millions of families trying to live on incomes so meager that the pall of family disaster hangs over them day by day. . . . I see one third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished." — FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

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The widely shared presumption that biological and social explanations *must* be set in eternal opposition leaves us hovering somewhere between Plastic Man and the Naked Ape. This won't do and is wholly unnecessary.

Yet Clarice Stasz declares in *The American Nightmare* that "If boys and girls in our society had identical experiences and opportunities, then the few differences now found between women and men would probably be reduced to an infinitesimal number." Whether a world of nearly indistinguishable wimps is what we really want is just one problem in her formulation; another is our recognition that male and female experiences can never be "identical," even if concerted attempts to place male and female infants in cloned environments were suddenly to become our number-one social priority. The reason for this is inescapable: males and females go through the world as embodied subjects, not abstract minds. Because their bodies are different in interesting ways, male and female experiences, too, will vary. It demeans men *and* women to presume that the only basis for sex equality is the homogenization of human subjects.

Within the pages of Michael Reich's *Racial Inequality* (a book that features far too many painful examples of just how awful academic prose can be—"marginalization" as a noun, "conflictual" as an adjective), a second ghostly apparition from Western discourse past pops into the picture: that rational calculator of marginal utility, Homo economicus. Although Reich explicitly hopes to eliminate Homo economicus, and apparently thinks he has, he winds up covertly embracing another variation on the model. Appending "ideology" to "self-interest" to explain what makes human beings tick hardly creates a compelling alternative to "self-interest" alone. The basic problem is that one cannot, finally, treat a subject as highly charged as racial inequality solely through the frame of a formal econometric model. Using such a model, Reich claims he has "proved" that race inequality actually works to the detriment of the economic interests of the white majority.

By presuming that human beings are governed by economic motives with an ideological gloss, Reich concludes that whites need not be hostile to campaigns against racism after all, or should not be once they have been apprised of the fact that they will actually enjoy economic gain with the achievement of racial equality. The palpable power—of sexual-racial taboos and projections, beliefs and fantasies—goes down very deep and plays a more independent role than most egalitarians, whether Marxist or liberal, are willing to concede. This power falls through the grid of Reich's analysis and cannot be taken up adequately given his narrow view of the human subject.

William Ryan, in *Equality*, laments "the extreme emphasis on the primacy of the individual and the great significance of differences among individuals" featured in the system Ryan claims we now have (Fair Play), and which he opposes. It is only "from a

Winners of "Discovery—THE NATION, '81," are Michael Collier, Garrett Kaoru Hongo, Nancy Takacs and Arthur Smith. They will read their poems on Monday, May 18, at 8 P.M. at The Poetry Center, 92nd Street YM-YWHA, 1395 Lexington Avenue, New York City. THE NATION will publish a poem by each of the winners in the issue of May 16. Judges for the contest were Philip Levine, Carol Muske and Gerald Stern. Now in its seventh year, the competition represents a fusion of The Poetry Center's "Discovery" contest and THE NATION's Poetry Prize. It is open to poets who have not yet been published in book form.

JACOB AND THE ANGEL

Before sunrise she groaned, caught him
and grasped thus, won him.
And he caught her thus, too, winning
so that both knew such holding
came to death.
They were beyond introducing, past names.

But at dawn, with first light
he saw her body
still white
in the places the bathing suit covered
yesterday.

Then, the sudden call for her
from upstairs, twice
the way a girl's called in from play
outside
so that he knew her name
as he let her go.

TOURIST

Sitting on a large stone beside Jaffa Gate
a beautiful girl from the Northern countries
oils her skin in Jerusalem, golden
as if she were beside the sea.

I said: Don't go into those alleyways
horny bachelors lurk there
spreading a net
and adulterers lay traps—
deep inside the half-darkness
are the sighing trousers of old men
and a strange lust hiding under sadness,
disguised beckonings, babble, prayer-sounds,
a many-tongued seductive chatter . . .

Long ago Hebrew used to be
God's slang in those streets.
Now I use it to speak
holy words of passion.

Yehuda Amichai
(Translated from the Hebrew by David Rosenberg)

Yehuda Amichai, one of Israel's leading poets, is the author of Amen *and* Time, *among other collections. These poems will appear in a new book,* Love Poems, *which will be published by Harper & Row.*

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position that stresses the collective, the similar, and the external," he goes on, "that one can prefer or even envision the kinds of social and economic arrangements" he celebrates as the Fair Shares society. In making his case, Ryan confronts us with a Great Decision. We must, finally, choose: individual vs. collective, different vs. similar, internal vs. external, as if these were somehow real, not wholly arbitrary, choices. Although Ryan recognizes that posing such antinomies is an ideological move, he defends his position by staking out the "collective . . . external" side of the ledger. He finds regrettable the "unsupported belief in internal individual differences among human beings."

Sinking further into conceptual rigor mortis, he asks: "Is human behavior to be traced more accurately to a source 'inside the skin' from which it ultimately originates? Or is it largely contingent on the characteristics of the external environment?" The unacknowledged patron saint of this effort seems to be B.F. Skinner, hardly a figure with a reputation as a great egalitarian.

Philip Green's discussion covers a set of explicitly stated notions from the liberal democratic ethos that incorporate respect for individual autonomy. With determined energy, he slaughters the likes of Arthur Jensen, Richard Herrnstein and Steven Goldberg. But Green leaves little or no space for any serious consideration of the possibility that important, not trivial, individual and group differences exist and cannot be accounted for solely with reference to the aggregate of external forces to which these persons and groups have been subjected. The existence of such differences, which would require a forceful biological and social explanation, need not put Green on the slippery slope to inegalitarian outcomes having biological justifications.

My second set of reflections center around the strategies these egalitarians propose to achieve their aims. An already cloudy picture grows even murkier. Michael Reich calls for "solidaristic" action once whites have gained a rational appreciation of the economic stake they have in promoting racial equality. Stephen Steinberg makes it his business to "demystify" ethnicity in *The Ethnic Myth*. He demonstrates, to his satisfaction, that ethnic characteristics ("cultural values") cannot and do not account for the success (or lack of

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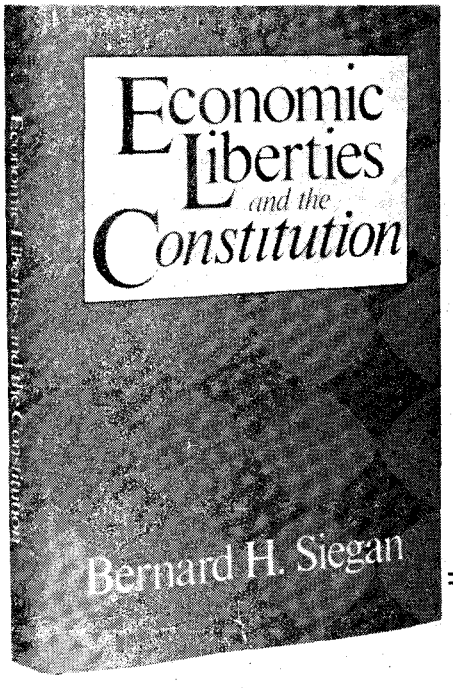

ECONOMIC LIBERTIES and the CONSTITUTION
Bernard H. Siegan

In this challenging book, Siegan declares that, if the Supreme Court were doing its job as the Framers of the Constitution and the Fourteenth Amendment intended, the nation would be much less burdened with excessive economic regulation. He points out that, while the Court is zealous in terminating state laws that threaten free expression, sexual privacy, or religious observance, since the 1940s it has done nothing about laws that limit the right of individuals or private corporations to engage in legitimate economic activities.

The result has been to give governments at all levels much greater power over the economic system and to harm society by inhibiting production, raising prices, curtailing competition and creating unemployment. Those most often harmed, concludes Siegan, are those who were supposed to be protected – people on the lowest rung of the economic ladder. 383 pages. $19.50

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it) of individual members of ethnic groups, nor of one group compared to any other group. He criticizes the current ethnic revival as a pitiful last effort with no solid anchor in the social structure. He finds a "fundamental tension between pluralism and democracy." That said, Steinberg would pretty much let the march of assimilation toward an overarching American identity proceed. A more egalitarian society, presumably, will be the outcome.

Steinberg joins hands with Stasz, Ryan and Green in coming to praise, not bury, Affirmative Action as strategy, principle, or both. Stasz is alone, however, in suggesting that Affirmative Action in practice may very well put a squeeze on applicants "who are not members of recognized minorities, yet who lack the financial or political clout to favor their case." For Ryan, this makes Stasz guilty, at best, of "transparent defenses of inequality." Indeed, Stasz is a prime candidate for a blast of Ryan's ire about all the "smarmy hand-wringing and cooing about poor working-class whites who 'bear the burden.' " To Ryan this is so much hypocrisy, which "reveals, I believe, the deeply rooted racism of those who make such arguments." I guess that makes Stasz a racist in Ryan's book. Green's more complex defense of Affirmative Action tackles the question of "quotas" head-on, comes out for them, but then opens the door to a host of problems when he ties his defense to utilitarian considerations.

Stasz would lead us into the good society by creating an "ideal management world" in which automated record-keeping made for better equal opportunity "programming." This is a bit of a fizzle. Ryan, who makes a strong case that the vast majority who are not poor are nevertheless vulnerable to economic disaster, weakens his Fair Shares strategy and vision with his dogmatic either/ors. Green's picture is the most compelling. He calls for the fulfillment of the implicit norms and values imbedded within liberal democracy's ethos of political equality and reminds us of the complexities of "the public philosophy" in a nation that embraces both egalitarian and inegalitarian principles simultaneously.

I wish, however, that Green had spent more time developing these important points and less to the stabbing, beating, garroting, asphyxiating, purging, dismembering, dismantling and general annihilation of those he variously calls the new inegalitarians, biological inegalitarians, sociobiologists and new individualists. Green informs us in his introduction that he finds the arguments of his protagonists "factually worthless, conceptually inadequate, and morally indefensible." Yet he goes on for 200 pages administering the foreordained *coup de grâce* through the generous deployment of terms like "notorious argument," "simplistic," "arbitrary," "fanciful," "willful," "tendentious," "simply fallacious," "sheer prejudice," "muddleheaded and ideological," "theoretically incompetent and factually false," etc. I don't find Jensen, Herrnstein and Goldberg, whose offensive articles and books date from 1969, 1971 and 1974 respectively, either as pervasive *or* as persuasive as Green. I think he exaggerates their impact on public policy and political discourse, though this is a judgment call. I do not, however, find it credible when (speaking of Jensen) Green claims that "the worst damage to racial egalitarianism in the United States . . . was inflicted not by redneck bigots but by an honored member of the scientific community

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and his educated supporters." The *worst* damage? I should have thought pervasive structural unemployment might be somewhat more damaging than an essay in the *Harvard Educational Review*.

On the road to his positive statement of purpose, Green offers telling critiques of meritocratic and functionalist models, with their implied legitimation of inegalitarianism and social hierarchies. But he undermines his own strategies and purposes when he reduces the notion of "desert" to the subjective expectation that *"may always justifiably be frustrated if overriding considerations of social betterment demand fundamental policy changes"* (italics mine). Oh dear. Whose social betterment? Understood how? Requiring what? This is one of several points at which the fabric of Green's defense of egalitarianism as a "moral revolution" begins to fray around the edges.

The most troubling formulation occurs when Green claims that in the egalitarian future no job that is a "degrading trap" could ever "be a normal career line." Either no one will do such jobs, or everyone will share the "shit-work," or it "will be done by incorrigible criminals by way of punishment (but a more humane punishment than being in prison), or by the truly feebleminded by way of 'treatment' in the community, or by genuine dropouts who don't want to do work that entails any responsibility at all."

There are at least two powerful objections to be made. First, what is to prevent the state, which holds an awesome monopoly of power sufficient to engage in massive social redistribution toward egalitarian ends, from labeling a certain number of its population feebleminded or dropouts in order to get the degrading work done? Even if Green builds in protections against this, several insuperable difficulties remain. What is an *incorrigible* criminal or a *genuine* dropout?

And the feebleminded. This makes me sad. By including the feebleminded in his categories of those who will be coerced or manipulated into doing society's dirty work, Green would subject a sizable minority of the human community to routine debasement, solely on the basis of ascribed characteristics they did not choose and cannot change. It seems Green believes such work is no imposition on the feebleminded who, being feebleminded, are presumably incapable of distinguishing between demeaning situations and those that are not. This is utterly false, as anyone who has spent time with our developmentally disabled citizens knows. But even if it were true, it would in no way justify their degradation. Green would be better served if he tied his egalitarian ends to a strategy that recognizes certain irreducible facts about human beings, facts which must be acknowledged if we are to forestall barbarism.

Hear the words of Simone Weil: "Equality is a vital need of the human soul. It consists in a recognition, at once public, general, effective, and genuinely expressed in institution and custom that the same amount of consideration is due to every human being . . . as such and is not a matter of degree." □

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LETTERS.

(Continued From Page 514)

plex questions. But a brief editorial must make certain assumptions about what its readers already know. One of history's better-known facts is the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church to the Jews. Although the doctrine of Jewish guilt has now been formally (and belatedly) abandoned, there is no doubt that the Church in some areas continues to foster anti-Semitism. Does Michael Schwartz think that there is no connection between the historical strength of the Catholic Church in Poland and the traditional intensity of prejudice in that country? He does not go so far as to say so.

As for Michael Myerson's complaint, we made no comparison whatever between the internal politics of Poland and El Salvador. We merely compared the belligerent attitudes of the two great powers in both cases.

—The Editors

TRUST CRONKITE

New Canaan, Conn.

I'm surprised that Blair Clark should fault Walter Cronkite ["Say It Ain't So, Walter," *The Nation*, March 28] for agreeing to become a director of Pan American World Airways. The gratuitous implication is that Cronkite's future reporting would somehow become biased or tarnished by his association with an airline. Not only is this unfair to Cronkite, whose integrity is above question, but it suggests that journalists cannot participate in other than purely journalistic activities without compromising their objectivity and sense of fairness. As a journalist for forty years, I think this is wholly unjustified. In my case, while publisher of *Newsday*, I also served as a trustee of Princeton University and of the Kress Foundation, which assists museums, art historians and worthy cultural endeavors. Did this mean that, as publisher, I would see to it that Princeton and Kress would always receive favorable publicity in the paper? Of course not, no more than Cronkite would jettison a lifetime of journalistic principles to please his fellow directors on the Pan Am board. In fact, I think that on balance it's good for mature journalists to enrich their experience by getting involved in activities outside their own field. The only ones likely to be corrupted by such associations are those with no ethical standards to begin with.

William Attwood

CLARK REPLIES

New York City

Newspapers are a bit different from broadcasting—reporters and editors, as professionals, are there to try to keep businessmen publishers straight. Cronkite still functions as a professional journalist, not as a manager at one remove from events he describes. I'm sure that Attwood when he was a reporter and editor would not have joined any corporate board, and the *pro bono* boards he was on as a publisher are categorically distinct from Pan Am or any other commercial outfit. Hence Cronkite's and CBS's great mistake, in my view.

Blair Clark

IDEOLOGICAL 'OBLOMOV'

New York City

Nikita Mikahikov's film, *Oblomov*, certainly reflects the state of the art in Soviet cinema, but reviewer Robert Hatch seems content to exhibit his misunderstanding thereof [Films, *The Nation*, March 28].

Oblomov is a character in Russian literary folklore known to even the semiliterate Soviet citizen, much as Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer used to be to Americans. For this reason, Oblomov is putty in the hands of the ideologically motivated Soviet culture machine, with its focus on revisionist history.

Our hero here is a ne'er-do-well landholder, content to lollygag around despite dwindling returns from his personal, but inherited landholdings. This is set against a backdrop of social ferment, disillusionment and uncertainty—all hallmarks of the vacuous czarist regimes of the late nineteenth century according to currently held revisionist historical views. It is no wonder, then, that Hatch finds Oblomov incapable of doing anything unless prodded by others. Isn't that the socialist way? . . . Above all, the Russians make movies for a popular audience to hammer home their view of revisionist history on all levels of Soviet society. On this score, *Oblomov* covers the waterfront.

The acting, directing and camerawork in *Oblomov* reflect the intensive training that one must undergo when plotting a career in Soviet film. Political reliability is also a key here. Thus it is not, as Hatch tries to point out, so much director Mikahikov's feeling that *Oblomov* is not now sufficiently appreciated which caused him to make the film but the lesson of *Oblomov*. That lesson is not to become an Oblomov, a man who, even through the tinted glasses of revisionist history . . . is searching obsessively for Mother Russia, or perhaps better, Stepmother Russia.

Eric Ehrmann

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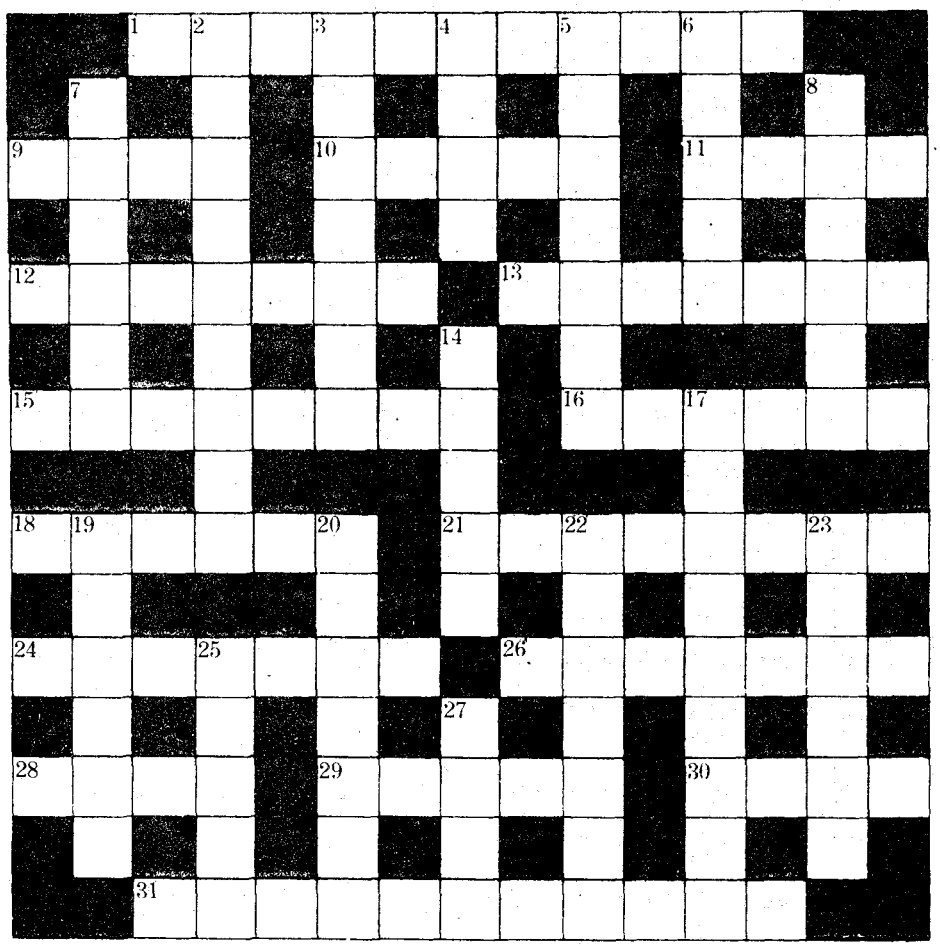
C	■	O	■	E	■	W	■	W	■	O	■	A	■	A
H	O	S	T	A	G	E	■	E	A	S	T	M	A	N
I	■	E	■	V	■	S	■	A	■	T	■	P	■	I
E	L	G	R	E	C	O	■	R	E	A	L	I	S	M
F	■	A	■	T	■	M	■	T	■	N	■	O	■	A
M	A	Y	P	O	L	E	■	O	R	D	I	N	A	L
I	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	S
N	U	M	B	E	R	S	■	S	C	A	L	L	O	P
I	■	A	■	G	■	U	■	E	■	M	■	E	■	I
S	E	R	I	O	U	S	■	C	L	E	A	N	E	R
T	■	C	■	T	■	P	■	R	■	R	■	I	■	I
E	M	O	T	I	V	E	■	E	X	I	G	E	N	T
R	■	N	■	S	■	N	■	C	■	C	■	N	■	S
■	B	I	R	T	H	D	A	Y	P	A	R	T	Y	■

Crossword Puzzle No. 1866

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 Sounds like someone is doing a striptease—like one in *Petrushka*. (7,4)
9 and 7 down A tie game might have been a letdown for fighters in the old days. (10)
10 Wolfe novel of 30 and the flower like this? (5)
11 See 31 across
12 Such as Hornblower would appear in splendid fashion by surrounding the end. (7)
13 Beware, as the Latin might say, a human from the distant past. (7)
15 In practice, meter yields a place for the dead. (8)
16 See 2 down
18 An old friend to dish out the dirt with? (6)
21 Not new-found fame and splendor associated with the Star-Spangled Banner. (3,5)
24 In the main, when confused, art is out of this world! (7)
26 Moving slowly, in the last imperial dynasty. (7)
28, 29 and 30 Weekday is made so, over and over. (4,5,4)
31 and 11 Little Tom living in southern Florida played quite a bit at one time. (6,2,3,4)

DOWN

2 and 16 across Ghostly comparison as an alternative, but it might not apply if the spread is printed. (2,5,2,1,5)
3 Not necessarily found in the diner, but perhaps necessary for transportation. (7)
4 Sounds like Jack is in the main body of the church. (4)
5 A couple of places to drink with a girl—one such reputedly shook 21. (7)
6 For some reason its turn was once considered provocative—now it's just painful! (5)
7 See 9 across
8 In turn, try "age" for a change! (6)
14 Quiet, only different for aviators to race around. (5)
17 Not full-time, obviously—not by the sound of it! (4,5)
19 Lox is a different thing—well, it should be pretty different! (6)
20 In music, possibly associated with the Poet. (7)
22 A branching part of the bad end Ronald came to. (7)
23 One might have to, to call a rose anything else—but men are so peculiar! (6)
25 A broken rivet, possibly associated with tossing a coin. (5)
27 With such a knock-down is it crazy to get up? (4)

SEE LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION AT LEFT

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